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# From scrolling to encountering Jesus

Evangelizing alienated youth

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"One does not become a Christian through an ethical decision or a great idea, but through an encounter with a Person who gives life a new horizon."

— Benedict XV

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# 1. Purpose and scope

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## 1. Purpose and scope

When you open your phone in the morning, even before you've said hello to anyone, the world is already speaking to you. A torrent of images, voices, promises and anxieties floods the screen. There, amongst millions of stories and demands, there is also room for the Gospel. But not as just another noise, but as a different kind of presence: silent, close, luminous.

Evangelising on social media is not about shouting louder, but about learning to be where people are searching for meaning. It is about letting God's love flow through our digital presence, simple and real. This guide has been created to accompany you on that journey: so that you may discover how to be a witness to Jesus in the ever-changing world of social media, and how to speak of God to those who have long since stopped hearing his name.

This is not about marketing techniques or miracle formulas. It is about a way of life, a perspective, and a way of loving. Social media is part of the arena where faith is played out today: it is the new Areopagus, where men and women voice their doubts, their fears, and their deepest desires. That is where you, the digital missionary, are called to be a sign of hope.

Europe is currently undergoing one of the most profound spiritual transformations in its history. Secularisation has left a deep mark on mindsets, customs and culture. Yet the desire for meaning, fulfilment and transcendence remains alive, especially among young people.

Social media is the new "Areopagus" of the 21st century. On these platforms, millions of people seek inspiration, identity and community. It is also there that the name of Jesus may resonate for the first time. This iBoocklet aims to offer a practical guide to initial digital evangelisation: that is, the first proclamation of the Gospel to those who have had no personal experience of faith or who have drifted away from the Church.

**Our aim** is to guide missionary teams in proclaiming Christ for the first time to people who have not yet been evangelised (atheists, agnostics, "ex-Catholics", "spiritual but not religious"), using formats and language native to social media.

**The expected outcome:** short journeys (micro-content) leading from discovery to interest, from interest to a first encounter with Jesus, and from there to human accompaniment until integration into a community.

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## **2. Europe and the silent thirst for God. The current context of faith in Europe (key data)**

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## 2. Europe and the silent thirst for God. The current context of faith in Europe (key data)

*“Europe is still beautiful, but it needs to hear the heartbeat of the Gospel once more.”*

— Pope Francis

### 2.1. The European spiritual landscape

Europe is full of silent bell towers and squares that were once places of prayer. Faith, which for centuries shaped its art, its thought and its calendar, today seems like a distant melody. Yet beneath the surface of scepticism, a longing for the infinite persists.

Many Europeans still define themselves as “cultural Christians”, but religious practice is declining year on year. It is not so much a denial of God as a learned indifference: the world functions, needs are met, and faith seems unnecessary. Religion has moved from the heart to the margins of daily life.

According to Pew Research (2018), over 60% of Europeans identify as Christians, but fewer than 20% regularly attend religious services. This percentage has fallen slightly in 2024 (by 2–3 percentage points) since 2018, but remains in the majority in countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Austria.

The group of ‘unaffiliated’ people (atheists, agnostics or those who are indifferent) accounts for 27% in the EU, according to Eurobarometer 2019; in some countries, this figure reaches over 40%. In Spain, according to the CIS 2024, regular religious practice stands at around 16% among those who declare themselves believers.

There are longitudinal studies such as the World Values Survey and the European Values Study (EVS/WVS) which show that the secularisation of countries occurs in three stages: 1) a decline in religious practice, 2) followed by a decline in the subjective importance of religion, and, finally, 3) a loss of affiliation (3-stage model)<sup>1</sup>. This religious decline is more pronounced in some countries, and the aspects of religion that are in decline vary according to the context.

But the thirst for meaning remains alive. It is expressed in the rise of meditation, in the search for emotional well-being, in concern for the planet, in spontaneous solidarity in the face of injustice, and even in the proliferation of gurus speaking about the need for mental and spiritual health care and self-help books. God continues to write in the margins,

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<sup>1</sup> Stolz, J., de Graaf, N.D., Hackett, C. *et al.* The three stages of global religious decline. *Nat Commun* 16, 7202 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-62452-z>

waiting for someone to translate his love into a language the world can understand.

Studies from the European Values Survey (2017–2021) show that many non-believers retain some openness to transcendence or spiritual practices of inner search. Even among young 'nones', there are remnants of belief (e.g. life after death), albeit with very little practice; the gap (difference or distance) with affiliates (people who declare themselves to belong to a religion) remains, but is narrowing in terms of practice. (EVS 2017–2021)<sup>2</sup> .

Being a digital missionary is not about convincing others of an ideology, but about putting Jesus back at the centre of human conversation: in the laughter, the wounds and the questions that arise every day online.

For all these reasons, the initial message on social media requires understandable secular language, sensitivity to historical wounds, and proposals that offer meaning rather than immediate belonging.

## **2.2. Causes and dynamics of secularisation**

*"The human heart is a desire for the infinite that is satisfied only in God."*  
— St Augustine

A significant proportion of European non-believers were raised in a Christian environment and drifted away due to scandals or disagreements with Church positions. (Pew Western Europe)<sup>3</sup> .

Today's non-evangelised do not live in darkness, but in a labyrinth of artificial lights. Some declare themselves atheists, others agnostics; many believe "in something" but do not know what. Deep down, there is more weariness than rejection. They have heard of God, but often associate Him with rules, scandals or authority. They reject not so much Jesus as certain distorted images of Him.

Others have been hurt by the Church and left in pain. They carry within them a dormant faith, which sometimes awakens in moments of crisis, beauty or loss. There are also those who live detached from any religious reference, absorbed by the immediacy of the moment and the pursuit of success. All of them need the same thing: an experience of gratuitous love, of someone who listens to them and reminds them that their life has infinite value.

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<sup>2</sup> Pereira Coutinho, J., & Wilkins Laflamme, S. (2024). Religiously Unaffiliated Youth in Europe: Shifting Remnants of Belief and Practice in Contexts of Diffused Religion and Cohort Decline. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 63(2), 406–428. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12901>

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center, 29 May 2018, "Being Christian in Western Europe."

In summary, there are four main causes of people drifting away from the faith:

- a) **Cultural change:** individualism and personal autonomy have become supreme values.
- b) **Loss of institutional trust:** scandals, clericalism and moralism have damaged the Church's credibility.
- c) **Social transformation:** science, welfare and technology have displaced the need for the sacred.
- d) **The digital environment:** algorithms encourage fragmentation and rapid consumption, reducing the time available for contemplation or silence.

And we can state that:

- a) Europe is experiencing a crisis of belonging: people trust digital communities more than institutions.
- b) Religion has shifted from being a legacy to a personal choice.
- c) Spirituality is expressed more as an inner search than as adherence to doctrine.
- d) The transcendent is reinterpreted in psychological or therapeutic terms.

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# 3. Who are the unevangelised today?

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### **3. Who are the unevangelised today?**

*"God never tires of forgiving; it is we who tire of asking for forgiveness."*  
— Pope Francis

In the digital world, all souls coexist: those seeking answers, those hiding behind humour, those sharing their pain without realising it, those who need to be seen. Understanding who these people are is the first step towards loving them.

Today's non-believer is not the enemy of faith, but its most honest interlocutor. They live in a culture that has learnt to do without God, not out of hatred, but because they have filled their lives with other certainties: work, health, technology, relationships. When those certainties fail, a void appears. It is then that the question arises: *what is the point of all this?*

Digital "initial evangelisation" must begin by understanding the terrain. Today we encounter various profiles of non-believers or those who have drifted away.

#### **The socio-spiritual profile of non-believers today:**

There is no single, homogeneous "profile" of non-believers. Contemporary sociological and psychological literature (Pew Research Center, European Values Study, World Values Survey, studies by Zuckerman, Taylor, Norris & Inglehart, amongst others) converges on relatively stable typologies. What follows is a synthesis based on meta-analyses and comparative studies in Western Europe and North America, with nuances relevant to Spain.

#### **3.1. Dominant (non-exclusive) socio-demographic characteristics**

Contemporary non-believers are concentrated in urban settings, with a medium-to-high average level of education and strong exposure to secularised environments. In Western Europe, religious non-affiliation is growing significantly among those under 40 and among people with high cultural capital. The correlation with education does not imply militant atheism: rather, it favours institutional scepticism and moral autonomy. In Spain, the CIS and EVS show a sustained growth in 'non-practising' and 'non-religious' individuals since 2000, particularly among younger generations.

#### **3.2. Internal socio-spiritual typology**

Studies agree that the "non-believer" group is heterogeneous. At least four subtypes appear frequently:

- **Convinced atheists:** a minority. High confidence in science as a comprehensive explanatory framework; low openness to personal transcendence.
- **Reflective agnostics:** they suspend metaphysical judgement. They maintain a philosophical or spiritual interest without doctrinal adherence.
- **“Spiritual but not religious”:** a growing segment. Rejection of religious institutions, but acceptance of meaningful practices (meditation, mindfulness, the ethics of care, experiences of a sense of transcendence).
- **Practising non-believers:** the largest group in Europe. Not hostile to religion, but it plays no role in their daily lives. They are not defined by an ideological stance but by disuse.  
This last group is sociologically decisive: it is not a matter of active opposition to faith, but of religion’s loss of social plausibility as an interpretative framework.

### 3.3. Relationship with transcendence and meaning

The data contradict the idea that non-belief implies an absence of spiritual seeking. The literature in the psychology of religion (Pargament, Schnell, Taylor) shows that non-believers continue to articulate meaning in life around:

- personal authenticity
- emotional bonds
- humanistic ethics
- psychological well-being
- projects of self-actualisation

What changes is not the need for meaning, but the source of legitimacy: it shifts from revelation or tradition to subjective experience and internal coherence. In Western Europe, many non-believers accept vague notions of ‘something more’ without formulating them in theistic terms.

### 3.4. Attitudes towards religious institutions

European research reveals three clear trends:

- **Institutional mistrust:** not so much towards the spiritual, but towards hierarchical structures perceived as morally inconsistent or anachronistic.
- **Ethical criticism:** particularly on issues of sexuality, gender and power.
- **Residual cultural memory:** even non-believers retain symbolic Christian references (rites of passage, moral imagery, festive calendar).

In Spain, the Catholic Church's loss of institutional credibility is a key factor in people turning away from the practice of the faith rather than in the loss of abstract beliefs.

### **3.5. Morality and values**

Studies by Norris & Inglehart and the EVS indicate that European non-believers do not display lower moral concern. Rather, they tend to:

- prioritise individual autonomy
- emphasise equality and human rights
- adopt a secular ethic of care
- value authenticity over obedience

Morality is legitimised by rational consensus, empathy and rights, not by religious authority. However, there is a high sensitivity to perceived moral inconsistencies within religious institutions.

### **3.6. Previous religious experience**

In historically Christian countries, many non-believers are former believers or former practising believers. They do not start from a religious void, but from a process of gradual disidentification. Common factors:

- the practical irrelevance of religion in adult life
- dissonance between doctrine and personal experience
- institutional crises
- secular socialisation in education and the media

This produces an ambivalent relationship: institutional distance, but cultural familiarity with religious language.

### **3.7. Existential dimension**

Psychological literature suggests that non-believers do not differ radically in terms of levels of existential anxiety, but tend to manage it through:

- personal projects
- meaningful relationships
- humanist philosophical frameworks
- wellbeing practices (not necessarily religious)

The fear of death, the meaning of suffering and finitude remain active concerns. They are simply not processed through traditional religious theodicies.

### **3.8. Key features of the dominant socio-spiritual profile today**

Summarising the evidence:

- No widespread hostility towards faith; rather, functional irrelevance.
- A search for meaning without institutional mediation.
- Distrust of hierarchical religious authority.
- Openness to diffuse spiritualities or wellness practices.
- Ethics centred on authenticity, care and rights.
- High sensitivity to institutional moral inconsistencies.
- Predominance of practical indifference over militant atheism.

The contemporary non-believer in Western Europe is not primarily an ideological opponent of religion, but a secularised individual for whom religion has lost its explanatory and practical centrality. They retain spiritual needs (meaning, belonging, symbolic transcendence), but satisfy them outside traditional doctrinal frameworks. The main challenge for any religious institution is not the intellectual refutation of atheism, but perceived irrelevance and a lack of institutional credibility.

To evangelise is to learn to speak the other person's language. Before uttering the name of Jesus, it is wise to utter the name of the person standing before you. The Gospel does not enter through the ears: it enters through empathy.

Generally speaking, everyone values authenticity, respect, solidarity, truth and freedom. They reject authoritarian or dogmatic rhetoric, but listen with interest to real-life testimonies, stories of overcoming adversity and experiences of sincere love.

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## **4. The efforts of the European Church**

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The Church has taken some steps. It has not turned a blind eye, but there is still a long way to go.

### 4.1. The synodal journey

The Synod on Synodality (2021–2024) has placed at its heart the call for a Church that listens, discerns and goes out to meet others. Pope Francis has continually called for a pastoral conversion that moves away from *self-referentiality* and places Christ at the centre, with an attitude of dialogue and closeness<sup>4</sup>.

### 4.2. Key documents

Some of the most important documents on this subject are:

- a) **Evangelii gaudium (2013)**<sup>5</sup> : It tells us that the joy of the Gospel is for everyone, not just for a few. The initial proclamation must be simple, direct and full of hope.
- b) **Directory for Catechesis (2020)**<sup>6</sup> : It emphasises the importance of digital culture as a theological space.
- c) **Christus vivit (2019)**<sup>7</sup> : encourages young people to be missionaries in the digital world.
- d) **Towards Full Presence (Dicastery for Communication, 2023)**<sup>8</sup> : calls for the building of digital communities based on truth, charity and listening, avoiding polarisation and superficiality.
- e) **Final Document of the Synod on Synodality**: Recognises the digital mission as part of the Church's mission and calls on local churches to encourage and accompany digital missionaries.

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<sup>4</sup> Final Document of the Synod on Synodality (2024):

[https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ESP---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ESP---Documento-finale.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis (2013): Apostolic Exhortation EVANGELII GAUDIUM:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium\\_sp.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_sp.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Dicastery for Promoting the New Evangelisation (2022): General Directory for Catechesis:

<https://evangelizacion.conferenciaepiscopal.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DIRECTORIO-PARA-LA-CATEQUESIS-2022.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis (2013): Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation CHRISTUS VIVIT

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Dicastery for Communication (2023): Towards a Full Presence:

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/dpc/documents/20230528\\_dpc-verso-piena-presenza\\_es.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/dpc/documents/20230528_dpc-verso-piena-presenza_es.html)

### 4.3. Concrete initiatives

Diocesan digital mission in Spain exists, but it is fragmented and uneven. There is no established national model; local initiatives predominate, often dependent on specific individuals rather than stable structures. Even so, several distinct institutional approaches can be identified.

Some dioceses have integrated digital evangelisation into their communications or pastoral departments.

– **Archdiocese of Madrid:** has developed projects such as *Misión en Redes*, training for pastoral workers in digital evangelisation, and the production of content for YouTube, podcasts and social media. It is not an autonomous department, but a recognised line of work within the communications department.

– **Archdiocese of Barcelona:** is committed to evangelising digital communication through platforms such as *Església a Barcelona* and ' ' training on social media for parishes and movements. More focused on institutional communication than on explicit mission, but with catechetical and testimonial content.

– **Diocese of Getafe:** has promoted digital evangelisation meetings and training for young Catholic creators, in collaboration with movements and communities.

– **Diocese of Málaga** and **Diocese of Valencia:** have developed courses for digital evangelisers, usually linked to youth ministry or communication.

These initiatives tend to focus on training, supporting creators and improving the diocesan presence on social media.

Some initiatives do not depend on a single diocese, but operate with episcopal support or diocesan collaboration.

– **Spanish Episcopal Conference:** through the Commission for Social Communications, it promotes meetings and conferences on digital communication and evangelisation on social media. It is not a direct operational digital mission, but rather a training framework.

– **iMisión:** a Spanish network of digital missionaries established in multiple dioceses. It offers systematic training in online evangelisation, support and face-to-face meetings. It operates as a structure parallel to the dioceses, although it collaborates with them.

– **Catholic Voices Spain:** focused on media and social media presence

with an apologetic and communicative approach. It is not strictly diocesan, but collaborates with dioceses and ecclesiastical universities.

Much of the actual digital mission takes place at parish level or within youth groups:

- parish social media teams producing catechetical content
- diocesan podcasts
- vocational or testimonial YouTube channels
- training for young digital evangelisers

Scattered examples exist in dioceses such as Pamplona-Tudela, Toledo, Seville and Zaragoza, but they tend to depend on specific leaders rather than permanent structures.

### **3.2. Common structural features**

Studies on ecclesial communication in Spain and direct observation reveal clear patterns:

- A focus on institutional communication rather than an explicit digital mission.
- Reliance on individuals (priests, nuns or laypeople) rather than on diocesan policies.
- Lack of professionalisation in digital evangelisation strategy.
- Lack of assessment of pastoral impact.
- One-off training, rather than ongoing processes.

In analytical terms, Spain is in the initial phase: there is awareness of the digital environment, but few dioceses have created stable digital mission structures with a budget, teams and measurable pastoral objectives.

The main shortcoming is not the absence of initiatives, but the lack of pastoral integration. In many dioceses:

- the digital mission is not included in the pastoral plan
- there are no impact indicators
- communication is confused with evangelisation
- digital missionaries are not recognised as pastoral agents

Where progress has been made, it is due to local leadership or specific individuals rather than structural policy.

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## **5. Theological and pastoral principles of the initial proclamation on social media**

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## 5. Theological and pastoral principles of the initial proclamation on social media

### 5.1. The *kerygma* as the core

*"Let us preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, let us use words."*

— St Francis of Assisi

The initial proclamation is neither a doctrine nor a moral teaching, but a joyful message: "Jesus loves you, gave his life for you and is alive today, offering you his friendship and forgiveness." Every method of evangelisation must converge on this essential message.

Deep down, what every human heart seeks is to be loved. Noise, fame, productivity, social causes, self-help... are fragmented forms of the same quest: to find a reason to live. Behind every "I don't believe" there is usually a personal story of disappointment or fear. That is why initial evangelisation does not consist in teaching doctrine, but in offering an experience of love.

When someone feels they have been seen and understood, their heart opens. That moment is sacred. On social media, it can happen in a comment, a direct message or a video that touches a raw nerve. Jesus is found wherever someone allows themselves to be seen.

That is why the first proclamation is not prepared as a strategy, but as a prayer. Before posting, ask yourself: *Does this content spring from love or from the ego?* What springs from love, even if it has few likes, bears fruit. What springs from the ego, even if it goes viral, withers away.

Evangelising on social media is not about shouting "believe", but whispering "God loves you" in the language of each digital culture. A meme, a photo, a true story can be the seed of a conversion. Jesus spoke in parables because he knew that the human soul opens up through symbols. On social media, images are our modern parables.

The first proclamation is the essence of everything. It does not begin with a catechism, but with a testimony. It is looking at the other person and saying to them, through our lives and our words: "Jesus loves you, he gave his life for you and he is alive." That phrase, which seems so simple, contains a universe of hope.

For many, hearing "Jesus loves you" is like hearing a foreign language. They do not know what it means, but they feel it sounds like home. That is why it is worth expressing it in a thousand ways: with a gesture, a story, a smile. The mission of the digital missionary is to translate God's love into brief, understandable and true messages.

## 5.2. God's Style

*"God's style is closeness, compassion and tenderness."*

— Pope Francis

Pope Francis sums up God's style in three words<sup>9</sup> : closeness, compassion and tenderness. The digital evangeliser must reflect these attitudes: listening, understanding and accompanying.

When Jesus spoke, he never did so from a distance. He touched, looked at and walked with people. That is why his word healed. That is also the style that a digital missionary is called to embody on social media. Digital distance can make us believe we are speaking to a crowd, but in reality we are speaking to specific individuals. Every follower has a face, a story and a heart.

In the digital world too, God's style is recognised by three characteristics.

- a) **Closeness:** you respond, you listen, you let yourself be moved. You do not hide behind an account's logo; you present yourself with your voice, with your story.
- b) **Compassion:** you look at wounds without turning away; you offer comfort rather than answers.
- c) **Tenderness:** you communicate without irony, without harshness, knowing that the Gospel does not need to be defended, but shown. In an environment where judgement abounds, tenderness will be a revolution. Every kind word, every respectful comment, is a seed of the Kingdom.

## 5.3. Synodality and discernment

Digital evangelisation without synodality degenerates into the production of religious content; and without discernment, into impulsive activism. Both elements are fundamental, not merely decorative. The digital environment is a cultural space with its own logic (algorithms, fragmented attention, polarisation, identity performativity). Operating there without synodal processes and without spiritual discernment generates noise, not mission.

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<sup>9</sup> Francis. (25 September 2016). *Homily at the Holy Mass for the Jubilee of Catechists*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Available on the Holy See's official website.

He has subsequently repeated the phrase in numerous catecheses and speeches (for example, general audiences in 2018, 2019 and 2022, and meetings with priests and pastoral workers), which has established the expression as a synthesis of his pastoral theology. However, the clear and academically cited primary source is that 2016 homily.

Synodality, in its operational sense, introduces three critical corrections. First, it shifts the focus from the individual to communal processes of listening. The digital environment rewards personal visibility; synodality compels us to contrast, verify and situate our own voice within the community and the Church's mission. Second, it allows us to read the digital landscape as a real "theological space": not merely a channel for dissemination, but a space where quests, wounds, imaginaries and resistances are manifested. Third, it prevents pastoral fragmentation. Without synodal structures, each creator operates as a micro-brand; with them, missionary coherence and continuity are built.

Discernment is the mechanism that translates synodality into concrete action. It is not a matter of endless deliberation, but rather a structured process for deciding what to say, when, how and from where. In the digital environment, discernment must be applied at least at four levels: content, tone, timing and platform. Publishing is not a neutral act; every post has an impact on the public perception of the faith and on the spiritual lives of those who engage with it. Without discernment, the reactive logic of social media is replicated: responding to controversies, maximising *engagement*, confusing visibility with fruitfulness.

The central criterion of digital discernment is pastoral fruitfulness, not reach metrics. Analytics are useful, but subordinate to the mission. One piece of content may go viral yet be pastorally fruitless; another may have low reach yet generate genuine processes of conversion. Synodality allows us to evaluate this communally: reviewing comments, accompanying processes, listening to those who do not express themselves publicly, identifying inner shifts within the audience. Ignatian discernment provides concrete tools: examining consolations and desolations within the digital community, verifying intentions, and assessing fruits over time.

There is also an ethical component. Digital evangelisation operates in highly polarised environments and within the 'attention economy'. Synodality and discernment act as brakes on the instrumentalisation of faith to gain algorithmic traction. They compel us to avoid doctrinal simplifications, caricatures of the adversary, and confrontational dynamics that increase reach but erode credibility. They also prevent digital clericalism: the und concentration of authority in high-profile figures, yet without community accountability.

In structural terms, synodal digital evangelisation requires at least: stable teams (not just individuals), regular content review processes, spiritual accompaniment for creators, theological and communication training, and genuine links with physical communities. Discernment is institutionalised through protocols: publication criteria, deliberate pauses in the face of media crises, assessment of pastoral impact beyond metrics, and spaces

for listening to the audience. This professionalises the mission without reducing it to marketing.

The alternative is clear. Without synodality and discernment, digital evangelisation aligns with the logic of platforms: speed, simplification, individualism. With synodality and discernment, it aligns with the missionary logic: listening, process, incarnation. The former produces religious content; the latter generates meaningful encounters and processes of faith. The difference is not rhetorical, it is structural.

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## **6. Language, style and tone (for non-evangelised audiences)**

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*"Evangelisation is not about transmitting an ideology, but a living Person."  
— St Paul VI*

### **6.1. Language**

#### **1. Speaking from life, not from the pulpit**

Speaking from life means abandoning a cold tone and grounding communication in concrete experience: verifiable stories, real processes, unresolved conflicts, everyday decisions. In digital evangelisation, the rhetorical pulpit creates distance and suspicion; embodied storytelling creates plausibility. It is not a matter of watering down theological content, but of anchoring it in recognisable biographies, contexts and life stories. The criterion is not the spectacular nature of the testimony, but its truthfulness and its ability to show how faith interprets reality, accompanies suffering and guides action. This approach shifts the emphasis from abstract doctrinal statements to existential mediation: less one-sided proclamation, more situated storytelling that allows for identification, comparison and discernment in the listener.

The digital missionary does the same. They narrate how God acts in everyday life. They show their own process, their doubts, their moments of silence. Authenticity evangelises more than perfection. When someone perceives that we are speaking from our own lives, they lower their defences and open themselves to the mystery.

Ideally, we should use simple and beautiful language. On social media, depth resonates more through beauty than through argumentation. Sometimes an image or a brief phrase touches the heart more than a treatise. Jesus never gave a lecture: he told stories.

#### **2. Avoid technical jargon and moralising**

Language is the bridge between faith and the world. For many, religious vocabulary is full of empty words: grace, salvation, sin, redemption. The digital missionary can restore their meaning. It does not change the message; it changes the tone. Speak as one who loves, not as one who indoctrinates.

Evangelising communication in a secular setting requires semantic translation, not banal simplification. Technical-theological language has internal precision but low public intelligibility. If not moderated, it is perceived as group jargon. Translating does not mean diluting, but expressing the content in experiential terms. "Grace" can be explained as a free initiative of love that cannot be bought or earned; "sin", as that which breaks bonds and harms me or others; "redemption", as a real

process of personal and relational restoration; “conversion”, as a change of direction that reorders priorities and relationships. This lexical shift allows the listener to identify in their own life what the theological term refers to. Comprehension precedes acceptance: if it is not understood, it cannot be discerned.

When you say “sin”, you speak of the harm we do to ourselves. When you say “grace”, you speak of a love that cannot be bought. When you say “conversion”, you describe the joy of starting afresh. In this way, the Gospel will cease to sound like morality and will once again sound like a promise.

Avoiding moralising involves replacing abstract judgement with an examination of consequences. Moralising sets out rules without showing processes or effects; effective pastoral communication describes human dynamics and their fruits. Example: instead of “selfishness is a sin”, describe how a relationship deteriorates when one person makes decisions without listening, and how reconciliation requires acknowledging harm and making amends. Instead of “God gives you his grace”, show situations where someone feels supported without having earned it: forgiveness received, an unexpected opportunity, the strength to overcome an addiction. Instead of “you must pray more”, suggest specific moments of silence that allow one to sort through emotions and decisions. The approach is practical: understandable words, rooted in verifiable experiences, that open up processes rather than closing them with pronouncements.

### **3. Use everyday metaphors, clean humour and a conversational tone**

On social media, everyday metaphors are a tool for cultural translation. Users do not come looking for doctrine, but for recognition of their own experience. Therefore, speaking of faith through familiar images (a message left ‘seen’, a battery running out, a house needing ventilation, a friendship that cools if not nurtured) allows dense content to be understood without friction. Metaphors bridge cognitive and emotional gaps: they transform theological categories into recognisable experiences within the digital flow. In short-form formats (Reels, Stories, threads), a clear image works better than a lengthy explanation. This isn’t marketing; it’s narrative pedagogy adapted to an environment of fragmented attention.

Clean humour and a conversational tone are equally effective. Social media penalises a stilted tone and rewards approachability. An excessively solemn register triggers rejection or indifference; a conversational one opens the door to interaction. Moderate humour — self-deprecating, without aggressive sarcasm or religious mockery — humanises the speaker and reduces the perception of moral superiority. It allows challenging topics to be addressed without triggering defences. In practice: open-ended questions rather than statements, brief first-person

accounts, and responses to comments that demonstrate genuine listening. The key is consistency: approachability without trivialising, clarity without oversimplification, and a style that invites sustained dialogue, not just immediate impact.

#### **4. Style**

God's style is humble. It manifests itself in the small things, in the everyday, in the seemingly irrelevant. Therefore, his style on social media cannot be one of spectacle, but one of closeness.

The digital missionary does not present themselves as a religious *influencer*, but as a brother or sister who walks alongside others. Their language is compassion, their strategy is consistency. The simpler the presence, the more space there is for the Spirit.

Digital evangelisation is not an advertising campaign, but sowing seeds. One day you upload a video that barely registers; another day someone writes to you: "Thank you, I needed to hear that." That message is worth all the effort.

To be a digital missionary is to believe that even a single post can be a sacrament of encounter: a visible sign of an invisible love. Every post, if made in prayer, can be a small host offered to the world.

Evangelising is letting Jesus speak through your creativity, your voice, your art. If He is at your centre, every algorithm becomes a path and every screen an altar.

The style of evangelisation on social media cannot be institutional or contrived, as we mentioned earlier. It must be approachable, vulnerable and verifiable. Credibility is built when the communicator shows real processes, not just conclusions: doubts, searching, moments of silence and concrete decisions. The testimonial account does not replace the content; it embodies it. That is why the approach must be narrative: telling situated stories, whether our own or those of others, which allow us to identify human dynamics and God's action in everyday life. Abstract theories have low retention in short formats; a well-told story organises attention, aids memory and opens space for discernment. This approach demands discipline: selecting significant episodes, avoiding overexposure and maintaining consistency between what is shown and real life.

The visual dimension is not ornamental; it is structural. Image, music and rhythm must reinforce the message, not distract from it. A carefully crafted aesthetic (framing, lighting, sound) enhances the clarity and lasting impact of the content, but it must be underpinned by conceptual clarity: when addressing matters of faith and reason, it is advisable to balance beauty with comprehensible argumentation, avoiding both empty aestheticism

and dry didacticism. Communication must be hopeful without falling into superficial optimism: presenting reality with its tensions and, at the same time, always leaving the door open to the possibility of faith, reconciliation and meaning. In practical terms, each piece should offer a horizon: an inviting question, a concrete gesture, a space of silence or a reference that allows one to continue on the path. Hope, in this context, is a viable proposal, not a slogan.

In short, the style should aim to be:

- Approachable, vulnerable, authentic and testimonial.
- Narrative: telling real stories rather than presenting theories.
- Visual: the image should accompany and reinforce the message.
- A balance between beauty (music/art) and rational clarity (science-faith).
- Hopeful: always leave the door open to faith.

## 5. Tone

The tone should not be one of superiority, but of companionship. We cannot position ourselves on a throne, but rather on the journey. We are pilgrims who have found a spring and wish to share it. Speaking of Jesus on social media is not about giving a lecture; it is about telling a love story that changed our lives.

The first proclamation is not imposed, but proposed. It is not thrown into the void, but offered with tenderness. It does not seek *likes*, but encounters. In God's logic, a single person touched is worth more than a thousand new followers.

The tone of the digital missionary must be empathetic, not reactive. Social media encourages immediate responses, controversy and public correction; the mission demands the opposite: listening, understanding the other person's context and responding with pastoral intent, not with a defensive impulse. Moving from imposing to offering involves making proposals rather than pronouncements, sharing convictions without turning them into weapons of argument, and recognising the complexity of personal processes. Empathy is not relativism; it is compassion and a means of engagement. It allows the other person to feel acknowledged before being challenged. A non-reactive tone avoids amplifying fruitless conflicts and protects the credibility of the message, which is weakened when it is perceived as a cold or moralising response.

Humility and joy are prerequisites for being understood. A communicator who presents themselves as the sole holder of the truth creates distance; one who speaks from their own journey fosters openness. This requires avoiding irony and sarcasm that might humiliate or polarise, and using understated humour only when it helps to humanise without trivialising.

The use of open-ended questions is key to sparking inner dialogue: "Where do you find meaning when everything is in turmoil?", "What sustains you when you lose control?", "What helps you start afresh?" These questions do not seek to close the debate, but to open a space for reflection where faith can emerge as a real possibility, not as an external imposition. In this context, tone becomes a form of pastoral mediation: less confrontation, more of an invitation to a process.

DO	DON'T
What has helped you stay on your feet when things went wrong?	If you don't pray, it's normal to feel down.
Is there anything or anyone who has supported you without you asking?	That's what happens when you turn away from God.
What are you looking for when you fall silent or switch off from everything?	You have to pray every day, whether you like it or not.
Is there a question about God that has been on your mind for a long time?	Don't question so much; just trust.
If you could start over with something, where would you like to begin?	What you need is to convert now.
What gives you peace when the noise becomes unbearable?	The only true peace is to be found in the Church.
What wounds do you feel haven't yet healed?	You just have to forgive and that's that.
What would you like someone to say to you right now?	God is calling you; you just have to obey.
Would you find it helpful to have some space to pause and make sense of what you're going through?	You need to go to confession as soon as possible.

**Table: Dos & Don'ts of tone**

## 6. Connecting themes (editorial lines)

*"Beauty will save the world."*

— Fyodor Dostoevsky

There are themes that touch the soul even of those who do not believe. To speak of them with sensitivity is to open windows to the Gospel. Speak of the search for meaning, when success is not enough. Speak of loneliness and the desire for connection, in a world saturated with screens. Speak of forgiveness and the possibility of starting afresh, because no one escapes guilt.

It also speaks of science and faith, showing that they are not opposed to one another, but rather shed light on one another. It speaks of beauty, not as a luxury, but as a sign of the divine presence. It speaks of justice, ecology and solidarity as concrete expressions of God's love.

When we choose these topics, we are not manipulating the public's sensibilities: we are responding to their deepest questions. The mission is to accompany people from where they are, not to take them where you would like them to be.

Every publication can spring from a question:

What does someone who has lost hope need to hear today?

What words of Jesus can give strength to someone who does not know how to pray?

What gesture can show that faith is still good news?

If you start from these questions, your content will be a seed of the Gospel.

To start evangelisation from scratch on social media, it is best to choose topics that connect with the real-life experiences of those who are far from the faith, rather than focusing on divisive identity issues, even if these generate more engagement. Algorithms reward confrontation and outrage; evangelisation needs plausibility and trust. Therefore, prioritising content that opens up conversation, accompanies processes and offers horizons of meaning builds a quality audience and sustained credibility. The rule is simple: before responding to what divides, propose what brings people together. Growth will be slower, but more consistent and evangelically more fruitful.

Some of these topics might include:

- a) **Meaning and purpose** (loneliness, anxiety, the search for fulfilment).
- b) **Forgiveness and starting afresh** (guilt, shame, wounds).
- c) **Suffering and hope** (real-life testimonies).
- d) **Science & faith** (compatibility, limits of the method).
- e) **Justice and mercy** (public faith, the poor, integral ecology).
- f) **Beauty that evangelises** (art, music, liturgy explained without jargon).
- g) **The historical Jesus and his message** (parables in 30–60 seconds).
- h) **Responding to common objections** (abuses, money, the role of women, sexual morality) with **truth + compassion** and sources.

Each topic should be addressed briefly, deeply and tenderly, always prioritising the person over the idea.

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# 7. Strategy by platforms and formats

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## 7. Strategy by platforms and formats

*"There is nothing truly human that does not find an echo in the hearts of Christ's disciples."*

— Second Vatican Council

Creating content that evangelises is not about producing religious materials, but about showing humanity inhabited by God. There are thousands of messages online promising happiness; what is missing are voices that promise truth.

Begin every project with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire your imagination. Then design your content with intention: what emotion do you want to stir? What story do you want to tell? What step of faith do you propose without forcing it?

Think of three formats that always work:

- The testimony: brief, real, vulnerable. "I used to be like this... then I met God... now I live differently."
- The visual parable: a symbolic image or video with a phrase that invites reflection.
- The open question: "Where do you find peace?" or "What does forgiveness mean to you?"

Use aesthetics as a vehicle for the message. Clean typography, warm lighting, and a serene rhythm can make the invisible felt. Beauty is not mere decoration: it is part of the proclamation.

Don't obsess over metrics. The Gospel does not measure its effectiveness in views or *likes*, but in lives touched. If a single heart is moved, it is already worth it. The Spirit acts in the mystery of every screen.

Evangelising on social media is the art of invisible sowing. As the Gospel says, "some sow and others reap". It is your turn to sow with joy, without anxiety about the results.

Platform	Recommended formats	Key points
TikTok / Reels	15–60-second micro-videos	clarity, emotion, authenticity
Instagram	carousels, stories, live streams	visual appeal, aesthetic consistency
YouTube	short series, testimonials	depth, storytelling
Threads / X	thought-provoking threads	dialogue, open-ended questions

<b>Podcasts</b>	10–20 mins, warm, approachable voice	warmth, companionship
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## 7.1. Star formats for the first advert

- a) **Short testimonial** (60 seconds): The short testimonial, in a 60-second format, serves as a minimalist narrative structure that helps viewers relate to the story without overwhelming them. “Before / Encounter / After” is not an aesthetic device, but a clear cognitive sequence: a recognisable initial situation (confusion, exhaustion, a breakdown), a specific turning point (a conversation, a silence, an experience of forgiveness) and a verifiable effect in everyday life (greater peace, a different decision, a repaired bond). The key is specificity and honesty: avoiding artificial drama and showing real processes, even if incomplete. The CTA (“if you want to talk, text me ‘hello’”) must be simple and non-intrusive; it opens a channel of support without pressure. In practical terms, this transforms the content into a gateway to a relationship, not just a piece of content for consumption.
  
- b) **30-second parable**: The “30-second parable” translates the narrative method into an ultra-brief format. It starts with an everyday metaphor (a phone with a flat battery, a house with closed windows, an unanswered message), extracts a clear existential or spiritual *insight* (the need for a pause, openness, reconciliation) and concludes with a question that prompts personal reflection (“What do you need to recharge today?”, “Which window could you open?”). The sequence of image–meaning–question allows the user to complete the inner process. The aim is not to conclude with a doctrinal statement, but to initiate a shift in consciousness that can continue beyond the screen.
  
- c) **Beauty that opens**: ‘Beauty that opens’ pieces use art, music or imagery as a gateway to reception. In environments saturated with stimuli, carefully measured beauty lowers defences and increases the willingness to listen. These are carefully crafted micro-pieces of visual or audio content (a meaningful photograph, a musical excerpt, an everyday scene) accompanied by a brief, contextualised Gospel phrase, without moralising or imperatives. The aim is not to explain the text, but to let it resonate in relation to the experience depicted. This balance between aesthetics and conceptual restraint allows the message to be perceived as an invitation, not as a correction. Beauty opens; meaning is hinted at; the decision rests with the recipient.

## 7.2. Pathways for the first digital advertisement

In digital first evangelisation, publishing isolated pieces without continuity reduces the impact to fleeting impressions. Creating digital pathways involves designing an intentional sequence of content that accompanies real processes: from initial curiosity to conversation, and from there to a first experience of faith. Planning allows messages, pacing and formats to be organised by stages: raising questions, building trust, offering testimony, proposing a concrete action (writing, praying briefly, asking for support). Without a journey, content depends on impulse or algorithms; with a journey, a progressive approach is built that respects personal timelines and facilitates the transition from consumption to relationship. This requires defining measurable pastoral objectives (contacts initiated, sustained conversations, referrals to in-person or virtual spaces) and articulating coherent CTAs at each stage.

Operationally, the journey combines three layers: **narrative** (what overarching story is told over several weeks), **relational** (how channels of dialogue are opened and sustained) and **experiential** (what small practices are proposed so that faith is lived, not just heard). Short series (testimonies, 30-second parables, pieces of beauty that open hearts) are scheduled with thematic and visual coherence, and moments of active listening are established to respond and accompany. The planning also anticipates the transition off the platform: when to invite someone to a private chat, a brief online meeting or a resource for deeper reflection, or when to refer them to an expert. The aim is not to maximise reach, but to encourage real action. An effective first social media campaign is not improvised: it is designed as a process with clear milestones, realistic timelines and ongoing evaluation of results.

### Example of a 12-week itinerary (first digital announcement)

#### Phase 1: Discovery (Weeks 1–3)

Objective: to spark curiosity.

Content: meaningful pieces, beauty, art, meaningful testimonials, existential questions.

CTA: "Where do you find peace amidst the noise?" / "If you'd like to share your experience, text me 'peace'."

#### Phase 2: Curiosity (Weeks 4–6)

Objective: to show Jesus as human and approachable.

Content: parables, short Bible quotes, common objections, top 3,

CTA: "Try talking to him for a minute a day" / "If you do this this week, tell me how you felt."

#### Phase 3: Kerygma (Weeks 7–8)

Objective: to explicitly proclaim God's love.

Content: short videos or quotes about the cross, resurrection, forgiveness, hope.

CTA: "If you want to start afresh, you can tell him today in your own words" / "If you'd like us to pray with you, text 'new beginning'."

#### **Phase 4: Accompaniment** (Weeks 9–10)

Objective: to offer personal dialogue.

Content: answering real questions, prayer guides, online community.

CTA: "If you'd like to talk in peace, send me a private message" / "We can arrange a time to chat."

#### **Phase 5: Community** (Weeks 11–12)

Objective: to invite people to meet in person.

Content: open invitation to an Alpha group/coffee meet-up, open worship or charitable activities (no pressure), group testimonies.

CTA: "If you fancy coming along to have a look, here's the link" / "You're invited, no strings attached."

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# 8. Risks and prevention

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## 8. Risks and prevention

*'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.'*

— Proverbs 3:5

The true digital evangeliser does not work alone. Even when it seems as though you are facing a screen, you are never alone. The Holy Spirit walks with us, inspires our words, corrects our intentions and sustains our joy. He is the protagonist of the mission.

Furthermore, in the digital mission we need a community of reference so as not to become an isolated initiative or a project centred on our own image. A concrete community offers ecclesial roots, spiritual accompaniment and criteria for shared discernment. It also provides fraternal correction, evaluation of fruits and human support when public exposure leads to wear and tear or criticism. Without this foundation, the digital missionary runs the risk of treating metrics as absolute, reacting alone to controversies, or losing coherence between what they communicate and what they live. The community does not limit creativity; it frames it, purifies it, and directs it towards real processes of encounter that transcend the screen.

We cannot deny that there are real risks in digital mission, and the community—with a sense of ecclesial belonging, plus the support of the Bishop or a Superior—is fundamental.

- a) **Polarisation:** The reference community acts as a body for regulation and discernment in the face of polarisation. When the digital environment pressures us to react or take a stance immediately, the community team allows for a calm assessment: which debates deserve a response, in what tone, and for what pastoral purpose. This contrast avoids defensive or ideological responses and facilitates choosing dialogue when possible or strategic silence when the conversation is blocked. Furthermore, mutual support reduces the temptation to take attacks personally: what is received on social media is not processed in isolation, but within a space where it is re-examined through an evangelical lens and decisions are made collectively. It is also important to be clear that, in the face of polarisation, we must not enter into ideological debates, nor adopt a defensive attitude; it is important to always opt for dialogue or silence when we see that dialogue is not possible.
- b) **Digital burnout:** To combat digital burnout, it is advisable to prioritise rest, prayer and spiritual accompaniment amongst missionaries. Furthermore, in relation to digital burnout, the community introduces sustainable rhythms. It establishes shifts, times to disconnect and spaces for shared prayer that prevent continuous overexposure.

Spiritual accompaniment amongst missionaries (reviewing motivations, examining consolations and desolations, evaluating fruits) helps to keep the focus on the mission rather than on external validation. This structure allows us to detect early signs of burnout and redistribute tasks before saturation sets in. The mission ceases to depend on individual energy and becomes a process sustained by a community.

- c) **Misinformation:** We know we must always verify data and sources. But here too, having a reference community helps. The community acts as a verification filter. No sensitive content should be published without prior cross-checking of sources, internal review and agreement on the framing. Teamwork makes it easier to verify data, prevent the spread of rumours and correct errors swiftly when they are detected. This shared protocol protects credibility and prevents the urgency of the digital environment from compromising accuracy. Responsibility does not rest with a single person: a habit of verification is institutionalised, becoming part of the operational culture.
  
- d) **Vulnerability:** In situations of vulnerability (minors, people in intense emotional or spiritual crisis), the community must have clear protocols known to all. This includes communication boundaries, recording of sensitive conversations, referral to qualified professionals, and criteria for not taking on roles that exceed pastoral competence. Teamwork enables the detection of warning signs of , provides support without overstepping boundaries, and prevents any form of emotional blackmail or dependency. The community supports the missionary in the decision to refer cases when necessary and ensures that the care provided is responsible, safe and consistent with the holistic care of the individual.

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# 9. Conclusions

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## 9. Conclusions

In conclusion, we draw four clear implications from this document. The first is institutional: the digital mission of the initial proclamation must cease to depend on individual initiatives and become integrated into the ordinary pastoral planning of dioceses, congregations and communities. This implies recognising digital missionaries as genuine pastoral agents, with accompaniment, formation and evaluation. Without this structural recognition, evangelisation on social media will remain sporadic, reactive and fragile. The immediate step is to create stable teams with clear leaders, defined roadmaps and regular review periods. The digital mission is not a parallel project; it is an ordinary missionary front in a new cultural territory.

The second step is methodological: improvisation must give way to planning. Initial outreach on social media requires a roadmap, not isolated posts. Every community undertaking this task should design specific content cycles (for example, 8 to 12 weeks), with verifiable pastoral objectives: conversations initiated, processes of accompaniment, and referrals to community spaces. This requires specific training in digital storytelling, pastoral discernment and conversation management. The next step is to establish common protocols: publication criteria, source verification, support for vulnerable people, and referral to specialists where necessary. Without these protocols, the risk of burnout, polarisation or malpractice increases.

The third consequence is spiritual and communal: no digital missionary should operate in isolation. Constant exposure, algorithmic pressure and polarisation require communities of reference that support, discern and correct. This involves creating regular spaces for mission review, shared prayer and spiritual accompaniment amongst missionaries. It also requires accepting limits: not every debate needs a response, not every crisis needs to be managed from a screen. The next step is to institutionalise these spaces for care and discernment as part of the missionary calendar. The sustainability of the mission will depend more on inner and communal life than on technical capacity.

Finally, the strategic implication is clear: the digital evangelisation of the initial proclamation must be oriented towards real processes of encounter, not visibility metrics. The criterion for success will not be reach, but conversion in the form of small steps: a conversation begun, a wound listened to, a person who dares to pray for the first time or to approach a community. The next step is to establish simple pastoral evaluation systems that measure these processes and allow the strategy to be adjusted realistically. The digital mission will not end on the screen: its aim is to open paths towards human and communal encounters where faith can be embodied. If this does not happen, the effort will remain merely

content production; if it does happen, we will be witnessing a true first proclamation on the digital continent.

## **10. A Guide for Missionaries Sharing the Good News on Social Media**

*"We do not own the Gospel, but are witnesses to its joy."*

— Pope Francis

### **1. Live what you proclaim.**

Before speaking of Christ, let yourself be encountered by Him every day. Your best content is your transformed life. Authenticity evangelises more than any speech.

### **2. Pray before you post.**

The algorithm is not your guide: the Holy Spirit is. Always ask yourself whether what you are about to share comes from love or from ego. Every post can be a prayer.

### **3. Listen before you reply.**

Behind every comment there is a story. Listen with empathy, even to those who disagree. Evangelising is about understanding rather than convincing.

### **4. Speak the language of love.**

Avoid incomprehensible religious jargon. Use simple words, beautiful images and human gestures. The Gospel is understood when it is felt.

### **5. Be a sign of tenderness in a wounded world.**

Your tone can heal or hurt. Communicate with patience, compassion and respect. Where others argue, you love.

### **6. Build community, not followers.**

Don't seek visibility, but real connections. Every person is worth more than all your metrics. The Kingdom grows from heart to heart.

### **7. Nurture your inner life.**

Switch off the screen to listen to God. Pray, rest, spend time with brothers and sisters. Without an inner life, the mission becomes activism.

### **8. Embrace beauty as a way of proclamation.**

Aesthetics can open doors that reason closes. Make your photos, words or videos an invitation to hope. Beauty reveals God without shouting his name.

### **9. Work in communion.**

Digital mission is not a monologue. Collaborate, share resources, support other evangelisers. Unity makes the message credible.

**10. Entrust the fruit to the Holy Spirit.**

You sow, He makes it grow. Do not measure success in 'likes', but in conversions of the heart. The Gospel flourishes in silence, even in the darkness of a screen.

