The Church as a Friend: A Touchstone for Theological Reflection on Ecclesial Communication in a Digital Age

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Introduction

Christ, who calls and relates to his disciples as friends[1], founded the church to be a sacrament of his presence in the world. The church, therefore, exists to unveil God's self-communication through Jesus Christ and guide human response to this act of divine love in a way that establishes God's kingdom on earth as community of friends. Communicative practices of the church constitute one of the principal means through which the church realizes this mission and reveals its identity. Literature on Communication Theology and Ecclesiology indicates that, in every age, ecclesia communicative practices are influenced by some understanding of what the church is and ought to be. In contemporary digital culture, the notion of "friendship" has become a major driving force and is used in many different ways for all types of interactions via social media. The church has called on its members to see new technologies as a means of promoting a culture of respect, dialogue, and friendship[2]. One challenge that confronts the church today is the need for a theology that articulates a corporate understanding of the church as a friend and helps Christians live out the spirituality of friendship in our digital culture.

My paper explores how an ecclesiology of friendship might help the church respond to the communication challenges of our digital culture. I provide a brief overview of the correlation between ecclesiology and communicative practices of the church. I argue that the centrality and rediscovery of the notion of friendship as a driving force for social communications in our digital age must be seen as God's way of calling on the church to realize its nature as a Sacrament of Christ, the Friend. I also provide a critical reflection on the church's theology and use of social media and propose a framework for developing an ecclesiology of friendship for our times. Finally, I discuss some affordances of adopting such an ecclesiology as a touchstone for church communication.

Ecclesiology and Communicative Practices of the Church

Ecclesiology is a branch of theology that studies "the set (sets) of experiences, understandings, symbols, words, judgment, statements, decisions, actions, relationships, and institutions which distinguish the group of people called the church" (Komonchak 1995, 57). Ecclesia communicative practices, therefore, provide an important lens for understanding the church and the church's self-understanding also provide a lens for understanding its communicative practices (Scharer and Hilberath 2008; Soukup 1983). The church is communications[3]; and its history shows that to a large extent, "the vitality of the Church has depended very much on adapting its gospel witness to the forms of communication of a particular era" (White 2001, 18). When faced with communication

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[1] John 15:12-15

[2] Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the 43rd World Communications Day called on the church to use new digital technologies to promote dialogue, respect, and friendship (friendship that is not an end in itself but helps people to walk with one another towards their true destiny in Christ).

[3] Avery Dulles (1972) makes this argument in his essay "The Church is communications" Multimedia International Series no.1. Attleboro, MA: Multimedia International.

crisis in a particular era, the church has always responded by developing an ecclesiology that responds to the social realities of the time in order to develop new religious symbols that express the cultural and religious spirit of the time but remains true to the gospel and Christian tradition.

In order to express the identity and mission of the church and help Christians develop a spirituality that will enable them communicate the gospel in the Greco-Roman world, the New Testament writers used metaphors, such as people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit, and kingdom of God (Congar 1960). To develop a spirituality that will help the church communicate the gospel in the divided empire of the 4th century, the early Church Fathers in the First Council of Constantinople developed an ecclesiology of the church as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic[4]. Over the centuries, biblical, liturgical, doctrinal, and sacramental interpretations have been offered to help the church deepen its self-understanding and respond to particular challenges in and outside the church (Gustafson 1961).

In the search for effective ways of communicating the gospel to the pluralistic and secular public culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the church developed the predominant ecclesiology of the church as a perfect society, "presenting itself as a more perfect subsociety upholding traditional order, preserving the timeless wisdom of the past and maintaining the institution of family and community" (White 2001). As part of its goal of exploring more effective ways of engaging the modern world, the Second Vatican Council echoed the biblical and Trinitarian ecclesiology from previous councils and described the church using metaphors, such as the kingdom of Christ, sheepfold, a piece of land to be cultivated, the village of God, the building of God, our mother, and spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb[5]. Avery Dulles has summarized the models of the church in six images: Church as institution, Body of Christ, Community of Disciples, Servant, Herald, and Sacrament, and provided how these models influence communicative practices of the church (Dulles 1976). Even though none of the models is meant to be taken in isolation and as an exhaustive explanation of the church's nature and praxis, each of these models influences the church's communicative practices (Dulles 1988). As White (2001) observes, the church's corporate actions and those of individuals associated with the church constitute a public communicative symbol.

Today, Christians are pilgrims searching for God in a technocentirc world. As in November 2015, about 3.2 billion people (40% of the world's population) were Internet users. Most of these use social media, such as blogs, forums, photo-sharing platforms, social gaming, microblogs, chat apps, and social networks[6]. Much of what "men and women know and think about life is conditioned by the media; to a considerable extent, human experience itself is an experience of media"[7]. In the quest for new methods of

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[4] The First Council of Constantinople organized in 381 AD. The Catholic Encyclopedia describes the 4th Century as
 a time of great crisis for the church due to controversies about the divinity of the Second and Third Persons of the
 Trinity and the divisions that existed in the empire during the time of the Roman emperor Theodosius.
[5] Second Vatican Council. Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church).Vatican web site
[6] This data were retrieved from Internetworldstats.com and ridicati.com on April 20, 2016.
[7] Aetatis Novae is a pastoral instruction on social communication issued by the Pontifical Council for Social Communication in 1992.

evangelization, the Church in the 21st century cannot ignore the technological revolution we are experiencing today.

The social media[8]"affects how we think, how we make decisions, how we relate to one another, how we construct knowledge, even how we think about God" (Spyker 2007, 75). As Pope Benedix XVI points out, these media are "bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships" and the notion of friendship is enjoying a renewed prominence in our digital culture[9]. Many church institutions and individuals Catholics are now "friends" with people on social media.

Even though church documents and other theological works show that much has been written on social media as a gift from God, the church is still in search of touchstones that will guide theological reflection on using social media for effective evangelization (Soukup 1983). Pope Francis confirms this when he observes that, "the revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge"[10] and that we need to respond to these challenges with fresh energy and imagination in order to share the beauty of God with others. I propose ecclesiology of friendship as one way of meeting this challenge. This is not to suggest friendship as a sole and sufficient image for the communicative practices of the church; but rather as one of the models that might help us unveil the ultimate meaning of the traditional titles of the church in a way that resonates with people in our contemporary culture[11].

Centrality and Trivialization of Friendship:
God's Call on the Church to be a Friend.

In our digital age, "friendship" seems to be one of the predominant forces that drive all types of human interactions[12]. Research indicates that people are driven to social media because of its promise to foster presence-in-absence, provide people opportunity to be with friends despite physical separation and give them full-time intimate communities (boyd 2010; Watkins 2010). People rush to social networking sites because they want a community that will be with them through the mundane, a community that will give them a sense of not just being known "but being intimately present with another in the living of life" (Crawford 2009, 259).

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[8] In this paper, I the phrases *new media, social media, and interactive media*, interchangeably to mean "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 61). They include computers, mobile phones, the Internet and its World Wide Web tools such as blogs, websites, and social networks, which provide "on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device (Vogt 2011, 17).

[9] See Benedict XVI. 2009. *Message for the 43rd World Day of Communication: New Technology, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue, and Friendship*. Vatican website.

[10] Francis. 2014. *Message for the 48th World Day of Communications: Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter*. Vatican website.

[11] I borrow Moltmann's idea of using friendship to disclose the ultimate meaning of traditional titles of Christ in order to better capture the dynamism in divine-human relationships. See Moltmann, Jürgen. 1977. The Church in the Power of the Spirit, (pages 115-116). London: SCM.

[12] Monsignor Tighe, the secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication describes friendship as one of the major drivers of human interaction in our digital culture. See Daniella Zsupan-Jerome. 2014. *Connected Toward Communion: the Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Unfortunately, "friendship" is losing its true meaning in some digital contexts. Many commercial institutions "friend" people online but these become customers or clients rather than friends in a true sense of the word. Many institutions boast of thousands and, at times, millions of "friends" and followers; however, human beings are reduced to numbers. The problem is not only with commercial institutions. Individual Christians and Churches might have hundreds of "friends", but the majority of them remain just numbers. The trivialization of friendship in our culture might be seen in comments such as this:

> The larger the number of "likes" or "fans" you have, the larger your reach. Our page has over 1,000 likes and Facebook Insights, the free reporting tool, shows that there are more than 292,000 friends of our page. That's a huge reach![13]

The need for friendship as well as its trivialization might be God's way of calling on the church to realize its nature and mission as a sacrament of Christ, the friend. For the church to guide human interaction towards authentic encounter according to the mind and heart of Christ, the church needs to scaffold what it means to be a friend in our world today. As Brother John of Taize rightly observes: "the Christian church, to the extent that it becomes aware of its own identity as a worldwide network of friendship, can play a highly beneficial role in a world searching, often blindly, for its identity and unity"[14]. Today more than ever, the church is in need of a theology of communication that articulates the church's self-understanding as a friend, and provides a touchstone for church institutions and individual Christians to live out the spirituality of friendship in a way that transforms the world into One community of God's friends. The renewed interest in the notion of friendship in the design and use of the new media should be seen as God's way of summoning the church to cooperate with all human beings in building the earthly city according to the mind and heart of Christ[15].

The Church's Theology of New Media:
Insights From Official Church Documents

As an institution, the Catholic Church's initial response to the technological revolution of the 20th century was one of skepticism and caution in which the church followed the new developments in social communication with "with vigilant eye".[16] In *Vigilanti Cura,* the church mandated all bishops and pastors of souls to obtain a pledge from their people, every year, in which "they promise to stay away from motion picture plays which are offensive to truth and to Christian morality".[17] This cautionary attitude was followed by intense research that led to a deepened appreciation of not only the dangers but also the blessings inherent in the advances in communication technology.

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[13] This comment was taken from an article titled "A Checklist for a an Effective Facebook Page" by Dr. Craig Webb, who is pastor The Glade Church and contributing editor for LifeWay's Pastors Today e-newsletter. See http://www.lifeway.com/Article/pastors-checklist-effective-church-facebook-page

[14] John de Taize. *Friends in Christ: Paths to a New Understanding of Church. Page 11*

[15] *Communio et Progressio, 7*

[16] Pope Pius XI. 1936. *Vigilanti Cura: Encyclical on Motion Pictures*. Vatican web site. This encyclical was written to guide a Christian reflection on the cinema and other tools of social communication in the modern world.

[17] ibid

The church's response began to focus more on communication technologies as "gifts from God". In *Miranda Prorsus*[18], the church put more emphasis on the need for its members to embrace and use mass media for the proclamation of the gospel. A more positive attitude to modern media is seen in documents, such as *Inter Mirifica*, *Communio et Progressio, The Rapid Development, and Aetatis Novae.* In these documents, the church underlines the dignity of the human person, the common good, truth, and freedom of choice as essential moral principles that must guide the use of social media. The unity and advancement of all people and society is seen as "the chief aims of social communication and of all the means it uses"[19]. In *Aetatis Novae* the church began to develop a keen awareness of media as a "comprehensive, thought-shaping, and culture making reality of our time"[20]

The church's theology of social media can also be discovered from the messages for the World Communications Day celebrations from 1967 to 2016. All the messages underline social media as gift from God for evangelization. Thematically, the messages have presented social media as a tool for the development of nations and formation of public opinion with the truth and hope of the gospel; for the promotion of freedom, peace, justice and communion; the promotion of dialogue between religion and culture; development of the family; protection and care of the elderly; promotion of the rights of women; protection and formation of the youth; the protection and education of children; and for the promotion of friendship and dialogue among all people. All the messages present social media as both a blessing and a challenge.

How the Church is Using Social New Media

The church has and continues to take many steps to embrace the new media for evangelization. The Vatican created one of the Internet's earliest sites in 1995 to share church documents on the web. An official YouTube account for the Vatican was created in 2009. The Vatican launched its web portal and a Facebook page in 2011; created a Twitter account in 2012, and the Pope App in 2013. . All over the world, many Catholic institutions, such as media houses dioceses, schools, parishes, and individuals have web sites, Facebook, and Twitter accounts (Vogt 2011). Church institutions and individuals are "friending" people via social media. It is not surprising to hear church announcements such as "please friend us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter" or "Please go to our Facebook page and like this event". Different conferences of bishops around the world continue to call on Catholics to use social media to spread the gospel. In addition to the various institutional use of social media, much effort is being made to train ministers and church staff all over the world to lead Catholics in the search for more effective ways of using new media for evangelization (Zsupan-Jerome 2014).

However, empirical studies that have explored how Catholic institutions are using the new media in United States, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Africa, have report that most church organizations use social media mainly as a replacement for traditional publication or as channels to post church teachings and to provide information

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[18] Pius XII. 1957. Miranda Prorsus: Encyclical on the Communications Field. Vatican web site.

[19] *Communio et Progressio, 7*

[20] Daniella Zsupan-Jerome. 2014. Connected Toward Communion: the Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age. Collegeville: Liturgical Press. (Kindle ed. Loc 1581).

such as mass times, PDF of the printed bulletin, address and contacts of parish staff, information about preparation for the sacraments, homilies, photo albums, and request for donations etc (Bridges 2013; CARA 2012; Crowley. 2015; Dankasa 2014; Tarimo 2016). Findings from these studies show that majority of Catholics use social media not to search for religious content or engage in overt religious discussions; but mostly for everyday fun things such as music videos, comedy, movies and televisions, and comment on people's daily life activities. This suggests that the church cannot limits its use of the new media to posting church documents and hope that people will search for them and be educated or even converted. Researchers have noted that presenting the church's teachings in the form of music videos, movies, and commenting on the comedies, the fun, the joys, as well as the pains and sorrows of people's daily lives have the potential to ensure greater interactivity with the people of God.[21]

Critique: A Bullhorn Approach?
Evidence from church documents and research on the church's use of social media suggests that the church sees these tools as gifts from God to transform the world, but not so much as a gift for the transformation of the church. While the church has taken many bold steps to use social media for evangelization, we need to do in order to harness the full potential of the new media in communicating the gospel message. The question we, as a church, need to address is whether the current mode of the church's self-presentation and use of social media promote interaction and relationship building with the people of God. In a 2016 conference of church communication experts in Rome, Mgr Dario Viganò, the prefect for the Vatican Secretariat for Communications, noted that in order to use the new media in a way that transforms our culture, "it is essential to "open the windows" and make sure we are responding to the questions of our users, rather than engaging in a navel-gazing exercise".[22] An ecclesiology of friendship will help address this challenge.

The Church as Sacrament of Christ, the Friend
Jesus Christ is the primordial Sacrament of God[23]. In Christ, we discover that God created us not to be slaves who would obey him with mechanical obedience devoid of love, but rather to be his friends, people who would do things with God out of friendship-love. Christ reveals God's love for us not as one between a master and his slaves; but as a best-friend has for a friend. St. Thomas Aquinas says God is our greatest friend (Deus maxime est amicus)[24]. Findings from my study affirm this perception of God as a friend. Jesus explains his ministry, passion, death, and resurrection as an act of

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[21] For more discussion on how the church can use social media to promote participatory culture in the church, see Eileen Crowley. 2015. "The Role of Participatory Culture in Faith Formation" *New Theology Review* 28, no. 1: 89-92.

[22] This comment was made by Mgr. Dario Vigano, Prefect for the Secretariat for Communications, at a Conference in Rome on May 27, 2016.

[23] Edward Schillebeeckx. 1963. *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. Translated by Paul Barrett. New York: Sheed & Ward.

[24] St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* II-II 27.8.

friendship and commands his disciples to emulate and make concrete in the world. This is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples:

> No one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I commend you. I no longer call you slaves… I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father...I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain...This I command you: love one another[25]

Christ, who calls and relates to his disciples as friends, founded the church to be a sacrament of his presence in the world. As Karl Rahner rightly points out, the church was founded to be the continuation of the historically tangible reality of Christ[26]. Biblical writers and and many theologians have referred to Christians as friends of God. John the Baptist calls himself "friend of the bridegroom" *(Jn 3:29)*; the third epistle of John ends with "the friends greet you. Greet the friends". Some early church Fathers, including Justin Martyr (c. 100-165), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215) and Origen, (c.185-c. 254) referred to Christians as "friends of God"

The mission of the Church as a Sacrament of Christ, the Friend is to unveil God's self-communication through Jesus Christ and guide human response to this act of divine love in a way that establishes God's kingdom on earth as one community of friends of God. A corporate understanding of the church as a friend will help church institutions and individual Christians reflect on how to reveal the true nature of the church and realize the mission of unveiling the mystery of Christ as the friend who lays down his life for his friends. It is the extent to which the church actualizes this friendship love that it realizes its nature as a universal sacrament of salvation in a world, which is thirsting for love, peace, and unity.

Some Principles For Developing An Ecclesiology Friendship for the Digital Age:

A practical theology of the church as a friend in our digital culture must involve a critical correlation of perspectives from the Christian Tradition, different cultures of the world, as well as contemporary understandings of friendship. The following principles are based on integration of ideas from Christian thought, classical Western thought, Traditional African culture, Friendship as practiced in the Islamic culture of the medieval near East, Classical Asian culture, and contemporary cross-cultural understandings of friendship.

1.   Friendship-love as a sacrament of God's love. St. Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx, Thomas Aquinas and some modern theologians such as Liz Carmichael present human as a locus for revealing God's love to the world (Carmichael 2004). The notion of human friendship as a mirror for divine friendship is also seen in some cultures in the world. For instance, in the Akan culture of Ghana, friendship is understood as a defining relationship between God and his creatures. The love and compassion of the Supreme Being towards his creatures is not only that of God as the grandparent of all that exist, *Nana Nyame,* but also that of a best friend who is always present in the lives of his creatures. One of the many names of God among the Akan is *Nyankopon,* (the One Supreme Sky God, and

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[25] John 15:12-15

[26] Rahner, Karl. 1963. The Church and the Sacraments (Quaestiones Disputatae, 9) translated by W. J. O'Hara. New York: Herder and Herder

ultimate friend). Friendship among human beings is expected to mirror God's love and concern for his creatures. Every good act is seen as mirroring the love of God and brings blessings from the Supreme Being (Ephirim-Donkor 2013).

2.   Friendship-love as Caritas, love which is both universal and particular; extended to the virtuous and the non-virtuous. It is love that requires trust, commitment, loyalty and forgiveness. Friendship-love is stepping into people's lives to do things with them. It involves the readiness to love even when it hurts; to be there even when it hurts to walk along. It also involves the vulnerability of allowing people to step into your life to know and do things with you! (Aelred of Rievaulx Thomas Aquinas).

3.   Friendship as a covenantal relationship. This is seen in many biblical friendships as well as certain cultures around the world. Examples in the Bible include the relationship between Abraham and God (2 Chron 20:7, Gen 12:1-4), David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:3-18), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:1-4:22); and Jesus and his disciples (John 15). The idea of friendship as a covenant is also seen in some cultures such as the Baganda of Uganda. In this tribe, friendship is a sacred relationship. A true friend is considered a member of the clan and trusted friendships are ritualized by a blood covenant or pact, *omukago* (Takyi 2013).

4.   A friend as another self. Friendship is one soul that dwells in two bodies; "a kind of mirror" through whom one sees oneself. Aristotle's influence on western thought on friendship is seen not only through his own work, *Nicomachean Ethics (NE),* but also through Cicero's dialogue *On Friendship*, and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* which disseminated Aristotle's views in the Middle ages (Nehama 2016). For Aristotle, a friend is another self, "a kind of mirror" through whom one sees oneself. He holds that "friendly relations with one's neighbors, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from man's relations to himself". Cicero also argues that, " he who looks upon a true friend, looks, as it were, upon a sort of image of himself" The good will or qualities that attract one to a friend are those that a person possess in himself. [27]

5.   Virtue, benefits, and pleasure are essential for the development and sustainability of Friendship: A review of most classical texts on friendship indicates that inside and outside kinship groups, true friendship is one based on virtue, benefit, and pleasure. Friendship is a private as well as public act for the good of those involved and the good of society. Friendship based on pleasure, friendship based on some benefits, and friendship based on virtue. Friendship based on the benefits and pleasure are not perfect because the relationships are conditioned by what they friends get from each other rather than loving the people for their own sake. Such friendships dissolve easily when those conditions cease to exist. Perfect friendships among friends combine all three objects of pleasure, benefit, and virtue[28].

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[27] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics. Trans. Joe Sachs. (Newburyport, Focus Publishing, 2002)*, 1155a23-8.

[28] Aristotle, Aelred of Rievaulx, Shelomon Goitein and other writers all posit that true friendship involves all three elements.

6.   *Friendship is an agreement in all things, human and divine, pursued with mutual goodwill and affection*. For Cicero, "friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection". Friends are people who possess good will towards each other and are similar in their views on and attitude towards the divine and all human affairs. "Goodwill may be eliminated from relationship while from friendship it cannot; since, if you remove goodwill from friendship the very name of friendship is gone".[29]

7.   *Friendship is a bridge between kinship and the larger society*. In traditional Chinese society "good relations with kinsmen depend on friendship". Many Chinese assess the quality of relationship with family members not based on kinship ties but the type of friendship that exist among them. During the Spring and Autumn period prominent figures like Confucius (551-479 BC) proposed a model for "good government and the creation of a moral society". In this era, friendship moved beyond the mutual love expected from kinsmen to include relationships of trust and loyalty between unrelated individuals who share some common interest and aspiration. Friendship become the defining concept for true and trusting relationship between the ruler and subjects, husband and wife, among two or a group of people with common interest and aspirations, such as Confucius and his disciples, and between on clan or state and another. For Confucius, the solution to the problems in society lies in organizing socio-political systems around friendship based on mutual support, respect, trust, and empathy. "In such a society, action does not spring from a desire for power or fearful obedience, but rather from a wish to participate with like-minded individuals in social action that is esteemed and socially beneficial"[30].

8.   *Friendship is a transformative practice, which involves both teaching and learning*. It is a lifelong search to know others and be known by them. This means friendships involves stages of attraction, self-revelation, cultivation, wrecking, failing, restoring, and renewing (Barry 2008). The questions that Ivo asked Aelred of Rievaulx remain essential for developing true friendships in all ages. Any person or institution that desires friendship should possess a soul that expresses Ivo's yearning:

> teach me something about spiritual friendship, namely, its nature and value, its source and end, whether it can be cultivated among all, and, if not among all, then by whom; how it can be preserved unbroken, and without any disturbance of misunderstanding be brought to a holy end[31].

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[29] Cicero, M. Tullius.*1923. De amicitia.* Translated by William Armistead Falconer; Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, (n. 20)

[30] Aat Vervoorn. 2004. "Friendship in Ancient China". *East Asian History.* 27, 1-32. Also see Kenneth Folsom,. 1968. *Friends, Guests and Colleagues: The Mu-fu System in the Late Ching.* Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.

[31] Aelred of Rievaulx. 1977. (1. 5). Spiritual Friendship. Translated by Mary Eugenia Laker. Cistercian Fathers 5. Kalamazoo: Cistercian.

<p style="text-align:center">Affordances of An Ecclesiology of Friendship for Ecclesial Communication</p>

Enhancing the Church's Participatory Culture

The church's liturgy, councils, synods, episcopal conferences, different devotional and social groups as well as parish organizational structures attest to the fact that, in principle, the church has always had a participatory culture. However, the way most church institutions are currently using social media seems to contradict its participatory nature. An ecclesiology of friendship will enhance the church's participatory culture and help the church respond to the call Matthias Scharer just made for a "prophetic provocation of the "Gifted We" in present times"[32]. In our digital culture, people desire friendship, participation and sharing. They love to follow and be followed. As Jenkins et. all (2009) points: Today's participatory culture requires

> strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe that their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another[33].

Using social media for effective evangelization requires the church to be both formal and "informal mentor", a friend who is ready to teach and learn from others. The church has both an opportunity and a challenge to explore how to be a formal presence, an institution with an official teaching from Christ, in an informal and playful atmosphere of social media.[34] It is important for the church to convey to people that their voice and contributions matter because today, people accept "truth" that is not handed over with a top-down approach; but rather "truth" that is presented in a round table and dialogical model where their voices are heard and shaped through conversation.

An ecclesiology of friendship might help the church reformulate truths about God, the human person, and society, in a way that allows people to express their lived experiences of God and what it means to be human without changing the message of the gospel. Participatory culture invites people not only to consume, but also to create and share. It celebrates collaboration. For people in the digital age, "to participate is to act as if your presence matters, as if, when you see something or hear something, your response is part of the event" (Shirky 2010, 21). In all aspect of ecclesial communication, it is very important for people to feel that their opinion matters.

Transcending a Bullhorn Approach to Evangelization

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[32] Matthias Scharer. 2016. *The "Gifted We" - an ambivalent Metaphor of Communion in a Digital Age and Inter-Religious Globe. Paper Presented at THEOCOM2016. August 31, Santa Clara, Carlifornia, USA.*
[33] Henry Jenkins, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice J. Robinson 2009. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. https://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/free_ download/9780262513623_Confronting_the_Challenges.pdf
[34] (Zsupan-Jerome 2014).

The bullhorn or navel-gaze approach to social media communicates self-centeredness and "It's all about me attitude, which are opposed in the digital participatory culture. An ecclesiology of friendship will also help the church move beyond seeing communication as transmission embrace a view of communication as ritual[35]. Making such a shift requires a return to the notion of communications as relational, a shared praxis, a participative and dialogical event. The church cannot continue to use social media as a unidirectional tool. If the church wants the youth to follow parish blog and other activities online then the church must be ready to also follow the personal blogs that these youths create. "In our digital culture of many voices, a new aspect of lay ecclesial participation becomes the authentic communication of faith on a broader, public yet less formal scale"[36]. A spirituality of friendship will help present the church not only as friend who does things for people, but most importantly as one who does things with people, a church that is always waking with people wherever they are whether online and offline. Today people are looking for a "church without walls", an ecclesial relationship that goes beyond Sunday (Cheong 2011, 23).

Developing a Theology of Social Media as a Gift for Two-Fold Transformation
Furthermore, an ecclesiology of friendship will help uncover the mystery of social media as a gift for two-fold transformation. Living in the digital culture as both teacher and friend will facilitate the realization of the two-fold transformation that God calls the church to, namely, the church transforming the world and being transformed in the process, which is the goal of evangelization. Understanding itself not only as a teacher, but also as a friend will allow for using social media in a way that makes it possible for the church 'act' and be "acted upon" by the grace of God present in the people to whom the church is sent. It will help the church to move beyond the theology of "inform in order to form" and embrace a new theology of "inform to form and be formed".

Conclusion
In every age, the church's search for methods for communication that meets the challenges of the times has been closely linked to the exploration of the nature of the church (Fuellenbach 1995). This correlation between ecclesiology and the church's communicative practices cannot be ignored in the search for ways to respond to the communication challenges that social media pose for ecclesia communication today. As Palakeel (2016) "in today's digital culture "several symbols, practices and beliefs of Christianity and Christian spirituality as well as the ecclesiological self-understanding of the Church need to be recast to make them understandable and relevant"[37]. Ecclesiology of friendship provides one way of doing this. It is a way of exploring how authoritative statements about the church and its concrete historical realities might be synched in order to develop a deeper understanding of what the church is and ought to be in our times.

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[35] For more on the difference between communications as transmission and culture see James Carey.1989. Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society. Winchester: Unwin Hyman.
[36] Daniella Zsupan-Jerome (2016).
[37] Joseph Scaria Palakeel (2016).

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