

TEC & TECHNOLOGY

After receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles were able to communicate with a variety of peoples. Contemporary communication, especially that of youth and young adults, is becoming increasingly couched in language of technology. Pope Benedict, in his recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* teaches that technology “reveals man and his aspirations towards development, it expresses the inner tension that impels him gradually to overcome material limitations. Technology, in this sense, is a response to God’s command to till and to keep the land (cf. Gen 2:15) that he has entrusted to humanity, and it must serve to reinforce the covenant between human beings and the environment, a covenant that should mirror God’s creative love.” (69) At the same time, he cautions that “human freedom is authentic only when it responds to the fascination of technology with decisions that are the fruit of moral responsibility.” (70)

Technology presents multiple opportunities to strengthen TEC. We also know that embracing the use of technology means dealing with some challenges. This document is intended as a guide and discussion-starter for local TEC centers. This document is not a policy. The TEC Conference strongly urges local TEC centers to seek out the official policies of their individual Dioceses in making decisions for TEC in regard to the use of technology.

Technology Opportunities

Digital Photographs & Videos

1. Digital Photos and Videos can be used to promote TEC in all sorts of ways, including websites, printed media, slideshows and promotional videos.
 - a. Some TEC centers allow cameras on their retreats. By so doing, lots of pictures are shared by the TECites and Team Members after the retreat. This operates as a modern word-of-mouth promotion to those unfamiliar with TEC.
 - b. Some TEC centers prohibit cameras on the retreat but assign a Team Member to be photographer. This way, photographs can still be used to promote TEC.
2. Digital Photographs and Videos can easily be made into a slideshow presentation for Retreat Reunions. A slideshow can run at the TEC exhibitors booth at diocesan conferences and youth festivals or at churches or high schools for promotional efforts.
3. Many people avoid TEC (or retreats in general) because of unfair preconceptions. Seeing photographs of young people sharing, having fun and praying can put the minds of prospective TECites at ease and remind prospective Team Applicants about their original experience on TEC.
4. Digital Photographs make it very easy to create and maintain archives for TEC. Pictures can easily be saved to a disc & added to archives.

Social Networking Websites

People of all ages are now on facebook, myspace and other social networking sites, creating a great opportunity for TEC advertising, recruiting and community growth. On these social networking sites, people share pictures, videos and written thoughts as a way to keep connected to friends.

Social networking sites can give members of the TEC community a chance to share their experience of TEC with friends. The personal testimony of a friend who has been on TEC is far more valuable than any promotions strategy. These sites also give members of the TEC community a chance to promote TEC by sharing their experience with all their friends.

The Core Teams of some TEC centers actively promote TEC by creating facebook groups. The administrators of a group can control the membership list and content of the group. These groups have become another way to reach out to the TEC community with news and requests. A private message can be sent to the entire group (like an email). Community news can be placed on the group page as well. Of course, the group is also a good place to share TEC pictures and videos – if the appropriate precautions are taken (see reverse side).

Websites, Emails & Texts

For several years many TEC centers have been using emails and TEC websites to keep the local TEC community connected. Websites are increasingly easy to manage and can include downloadable newsletters and applications as well as password protected pages for community members only. Some TEC Centers are also experimenting with text messaging subscription services. These usually charge a few dollars per phone number, per year & allow the account holder to send out an unlimited number of texts to their TEC Community.

Technology Challenges & Concerns (with some proposed solutions)

Digital Photographs & Videos

A person's image should never be published by TEC on the internet or in print publication without the person's permission – especially if their name is listed below the photograph. In the case of minors, an image release form signed by the young person's parents MUST be acquired. A sample image release form can be found on the best practices page of www.tecconference.org – most dioceses also have one.

In all cases, it is most prudent to obtain a signed image release form (regardless of age) – even if the person is a friend of TEC. It is possible for someone to copy a photograph from a TEC website & use for some unseemly purpose elsewhere on the internet, prompting the person to blame TEC for putting the image out there in the first place. A signed image release form will protect TEC in almost every situation.

Most TEC centers ask community members to preserve the surprise of the Wheat Team, Wheat Letters and the Hoot/Reunion so that future TECites can enjoy the surprise on their retreat. If cameras are allowed on TEC retreats, a leader may need to remind the participants that preserving these surprises means that they should refrain from posting certain pictures online. However, TEC leaders should remember that if participants are allowed to use cameras during the retreat, TEC cannot ultimately maintain control of those pictures.

Social Networking Websites

If a local TEC Core Team decides to create an official group on a social networking site, it must be committed to its upkeep. For example, facebook allows certain controls for group administrators. These include hiding some content from non-members and the ability to approve membership requests. Of course, inappropriate comments or pictures posted by group members should be quickly removed by administrators. An official social networking group for a local TEC center (or for individual TEC retreats) can be a good way to get community news distributed and will help community members stay connected and ask for prayers. It should be noted, that when a local TEC center decides to not create and monitor an official group, unofficial groups created by well-intentioned community members can become difficult to control.

While the content on an official TEC social networking group can be controlled by its administrators, individual TEC community members who post pictures and comments on their own facebook profiles cannot be controlled by a Core Team. If community members post messages or pictures which are not consistent with Church teaching or Christian morals, a crossroads is encountered. TEC leaders, when choosing a team, should take this information into account and discern if this community member is in a good place to minister on a TEC retreat.

If the person posting the inappropriate material is a young person, TEC Leaders should recognize a valuable opportunity to minister and lead. We need to find ways to lead our young community members to introspection – without making them feel judged. We should consider carefully who is the best messenger for this mission. We must all be reminded that “I am one person – I cannot be someone on a TEC retreat and someone else online.” We must seek to be integrated people, conscious of the image we project.

Websites, Emails & Texts

A challenge with regard to emails is that they change from time to time (like physical mailing addresses) and require constant updating. Also, if too many emails are received from TEC, some people will begin to ignore them or mark them as spam. Prudence and organization can help ensure that community members are not getting multiple TEC emails each week.

Another email issue is that increasingly, young people are not using email except for official school business. They use facebook and texts, checking email about once each week. If the Lay Directors are going to use email to get information to the team, they should specifically announce that email will be the primary mode of communication and request all team members to check email daily.

Only interested participants should be signed up for a text message system. These systems can be expensive, requiring a community to choose between a per-participant charge or factoring the cost into application fees. With regard to adult mentors texting and messaging minors, adults should be cautioned to adhere to the same principles which guide real time ministry with minors – ministry of this sort should not be done in isolation, outside the view of others. **In this, and in all matters discussed in this document, the policies and guidelines of the local Diocese should be sought out and employed by local TEC leaders.**