



VOL. 4, NO. 1 WINTER 2017

a publication of SLIconnect,  
Saint Luke Institute's education  
resource | SLIconnect.org

**sliconnect**  
Resources for Healthy Life & Ministry

## HEALTHY TECH USE

### Finding your digital media balance

**S**ocial media, texting and email are tools that can help improve our lives. Unfortunately, digital communication also can start to feel like a burden.

The Internet and social media are increasingly a part of ministry and can be helpful for communication and evangelization, especially with younger Catholics who are “digital natives” growing up with technology as a part of daily life.

“The Church, in virtue of the mandate received from Christ, looks

confidently at the possibilities offered by the digital world for evangelization. There are new ‘places’ through which many are moving daily, ‘digital peripheries’ which should not be deprived of the possibility of an authentic culture of encounter in the name of Jesus, to build up one People of God...” (*Ratio Fundamentalis*, 98)

The challenge in such an increasingly connected and “plugged-in” world is maintaining healthy boundaries. This

*continued on page 2*

### Reducing social media stress

**W**e often turn to social media to connect with friends and share news. What happens when enjoyment is replaced with stress?

Nearly 40 percent of adults recently reported feeling stressed by social media posts about the election and cultural hot-button issues (*American Psychological Association, October 2016*).

“Social media is often used as a coping strategy,” says Taryn Millar, Psy.D., chief operating officer for Saint Luke Institute. “People turn to social media to escape stress. Now, rather than the relief they expect, social media is bringing more stress.”

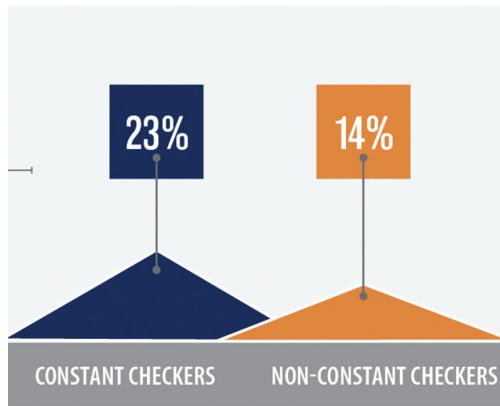
Dr. Millar recommends simple coping strategies to decrease stress levels.

Limit your time on social media. Turn off notification alerts on your phone and email. Find a replacement activity that you enjoy: another kind of safe technology, a walk, deep breathing, mindfulness or a fun activity.

You cannot control what others write, but you can practice good self care so you are less stressed and don't post something impulsively you will regret.

Finally, if you need to be online for work or ministry, restrict this activity to normal work hours. Don't post at night when you are tired. Also, plan a short break immediately after being online to give yourself time to decompress if needed.

Technology use is a “somewhat or significant” source of stress

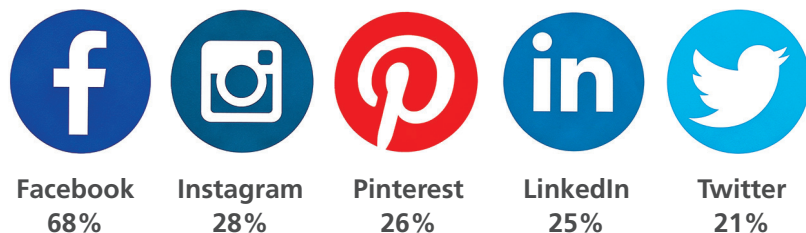


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## Setting Digital Boundaries

- Turn off all “blue-light” devices one hour before bedtime; engage in a wind-down (no technology) activity
- Review the settings on your phone and social media accounts; err on the side of protecting your privacy
- Keep the phone off the table at meals
- Be intentional about times in your day/week/month where you totally “unplug”
- Consider your relationships and how you are seen by others
- Keep a critical eye on your motivation for “sharing”

## Most popular social media used by U.S. adults



<http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/>

## Finding your digital balance

**Effective strategies, continued**  
*from page 1*

includes the amount of time we spend engaging in digital media as well as how we represent ourselves when we communicate via email, text, blogs and apps.

It is important to consider both your needs and preferences for digital communication and establish personal guidelines for using digital and social media.

### Digital May Not Be Best

Emailing - and even communicating via social media - often is essential for work productivity and staying socially connected, but relying exclusively on digital communication can be isolating and even hinder effective communication.

Digital communication tends to work best when dealing with more basic, easily understood factual information. When dealing with a potential conflict, one-on-one direct interaction often is better because it tends to reduce miscommunication, according to Dr. Emily Cash, Psy.D., director of Saint Luke Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

Before sending a text or email on a sensitive topic, slow down. Consider the impact of a written versus verbal response. Check your message’s “tone of voice” before sending. Clarify messages sent to you if the tone or intention is not clear: “My understanding is this....Is that correct?” (*Tartakovsky, 2016*)

Don’t react too quickly when you see a tweet, Facebook post or other social media that is provocative. Reflect on whether you really need to weigh in with a comment and, if you do, make sure the tone of your response reflects your public role in Church ministry. These can be evangelizing moments, also, if handled correctly.

For ministry or work topics of a controversial or sensitive nature, pick up the phone or schedule a meeting to address the issue. In-person, pastoral engagement with parishioners, staff, colleagues and community members, while initially more time-consuming, can lead to better outcomes and relationships over time.

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## Authentic communication in a digital age

**H**ow intentional are you about using technology?

As Pope Francis has said: “It is not technology which determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal.” (*Message for the World Day of Communications, 2016*)

“Discernment is less about seeking direction than allowing God to guide one’s heart,” says Capuchin Father David Songy, S.T.D., Psy.D..

The president of Saint Luke Institute, Fr. Songy notes, “The various passions move us toward a particular good and away from evil, manifesting our true desires. The spiritual masters offered wisdom on being attentive to the experience of God in prayer and within the community so that Christians could

recognize these movements. One particular principle was mindfulness, i.e., attentiveness to experience.”

This can be applied to our use of communication technology.

“In this virtual age, images and messages can seem overwhelming and even chaotic, but they are nevertheless the ‘stuff’ of human experience, demanding thoughtfulness and attention,” Fr. Songy notes.

We should consider whether “our experience in the digital world moves our hearts toward God or toward another good” as we discern our participation in media.

This includes contemplation on how we are engaging in online dialogue, such as what we write and share on social media, what we consume and how much time we spend online.

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**Balance**, continued from page 2

### Daily Technology Use

Excessive use of digital media can negatively impact relationships and have detrimental health effects. Neurological research indicates that extended amounts of “screen time” have a measurable negative impact on the brain (*Dunckley, 2014*). The behavioral effects of technology overuse are all too familiar: sensory overload, sleep deprivation and generalized stress.

Being intentional about when and how much you use smartphones, tablets and computers can increase overall wellness.

Good, consistent sleep is critical for physical and mental health, and technology use certainly disrupts sleep patterns. Many experts recommend turning off phones or tablets an hour before bed.

The light – not to mention the unrelenting flow of information – can make it difficult for our bodies to quiet themselves.

Establish guidelines for when, where and how often to use digital media – avoid using a smartphone at meal times and social gatherings, for example. Or consider a social media fast during Lent. Set aside specific times each day or week to refrain from using technology.

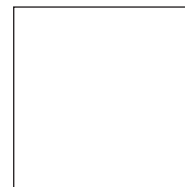
Setting boundaries like these can also increase work productivity: answering emails during specific times of the day can leave time for focused work on other projects, encourage creative thinking or just create a much-needed break from the typical barrage of requests and information.

Technology is part of our world and can help us connect with parishioners and seekers, but only if we learn to control it versus allowing it to control us.

The average tech user spends 23 hours each week emailing, texting and using social media and other forms of online communication.

This includes 8 hours on email, 7 hours on Facebook and 5 hours on YouTube.

Source: Mielach  
“The Lost Art of Getting Together”



## CONNECTIONS

for healthy life and ministry

Susan Gibbs  
Editor

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<b>Navigating Cultural Identity: Deepening Understanding of Ourselves &amp; Others</b> Thursday, May 18, 2017, 1-2 p.m. ET Crystal Taylor-Dietz, Psy.D.	<b>Healthy Anger: Skills for Communication &amp; Confrontation</b> Thursday, June 22, 2017, 1-2 p.m. ET Taryn Millar, Psy.D.

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