

2018 World Communications Day Reflection



In his message for the [2018 World Communications Day](#) (May 13), Pope Francis invites us to denounce “fake news” and instead to promote a “journalism of peace,” founded on truth and right relationship. In this reflection, we invite you to consider how “fake news” has impacted your life and society and to discern how you will respond to this call by reading the following selections from the Pope’s message and reflecting on the suggested questions.

Reflection

1. *What is “fake” about fake news?*

[Fake news] has to do with false information based on non-existent or distorted data meant to deceive and manipulate the reader. (paragraph 3)

The effectiveness of fake news is primarily due to its ability to mimic real news, to seem plausible. ... [I]t grasps people’s attention by appealing to stereotypes and common social prejudices, and exploiting instantaneous emotions like anxiety, contempt, anger and frustration. (paragraph 4)

Disinformation ... thrives on the absence of healthy confrontation with other sources of information that could effectively challenge prejudices and generate constructive dialogue; instead, it risks turning people into unwilling accomplices in spreading biased and baseless ideas. The tragedy of disinformation is that it discredits others, presenting them as enemies, to the point of demonizing them and fomenting conflict. Fake

news is a sign of intolerant and hypersensitive attitudes, and leads only to the spread of arrogance and hatred. (Paragraph 5)

2. *How can we recognize fake news?*

None of us can feel exempted from the duty of countering these falsehoods (paragraph 6). Yet preventing and identifying the way disinformation works also calls for a profound and careful process of discernment (paragraph 7). That is why education for truth means teaching people how to discern, evaluate and understand our deepest desires and inclinations (paragraph 10).

Suggested reflection questions

- *What kind of “fake news” have you experienced? Where do you see evidence of it?*
- *How has “fake news” impacted your society and culture?*
- *What connections do you see between “fake news” and violence towards people, other beings, and creation?*

Reflection

3. *"The truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32)*

So how do we defend ourselves? ... To discern the truth, we need to discern everything that encourages communion and promotes goodness from whatever instead tends to isolate, divide, and oppose. ... We can recognize the truth of statements from their fruits: whether they provoke quarrels, foment division, encourage resignation; or, on the other hand, they promote informed and mature reflection leading to constructive dialogue and fruitful results. (paragraphs 12 & 13)

4. *Peace is the true news*

The best antidotes to falsehoods are not strategies, but people: people who are not greedy but ready to listen, people who make the effort to engage in sincere dialogue so that the truth can emerge; people who are attracted by goodness and take responsibility for how they use language.

(paragraph 14)

I would like, then, to invite everyone to promote a journalism of peace. ... I mean a journalism that is truthful and opposed to falsehoods, rhetorical slogans, and sensational headlines. A journalism created by people for people, one that is at the service of all, especially those – and they are the majority in our world – who have no voice. A journalism less concentrated on breaking news than on exploring the underlying causes of conflicts, in order to promote deeper understanding and contribute to their resolution by setting in place virtuous processes. A journalism committed to pointing out alternatives to the escalation of shouting matches and verbal violence. (paragraph 15)



Suggested reflection questions

- *The problem of “fake news” forces us to consider how we might contribute to this problem individually and collectively. Having reflected on this, how might this change your behavior online (e.g. internet, social media—Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, etc.)?*

- *How do you determine which sources of information you trust?*
- *What other actions might you take to combat “fake news” and promote truth?*

✻ Closing Prayer ✻

Drawing inspiration from a Franciscan prayer, we turn to the Truth in person:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Help us to recognize the evil latent in a communication that does not build communion.

Help us to remove the venom from our judgements.

Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.

You are faithful and trustworthy; may our words be seeds of goodness for the world:

where there is shouting, let us practise listening;

where there is confusion, let us inspire harmony;

where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity;

where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity;

where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety;

where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions;

where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust;

where there is hostility, let us bring respect;

where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.

—Vatican, 24 January 2018



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