

## Summit urges Filipinos to spread the Gospel with the power of social media

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Nuns tweet and post on Facebook as part of activities of 1st Catholic Social Media Summit, held July 14-15 in Marikina City, Philippines. (NCR photo/N.J. Viehland)

**MARIKINA CITY, Philippines** -- Social media's popularity among Filipino youth is increasing, and the Philippines church is tapping these tools to spread the Gospel.

More than 400 people from various cities gathered at Renaissance Hotel in Marikina City, east of Manila, for [1st Catholic Social Media Summit](#) [1] over the weekend. They examined the advantages of and problems with various types of social media and explored ways to make full use of the tools for forming vibrant Christian communities online and in real life.

At the summit, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle, a popular online figure, clicked the switch for the video that introduced [the program](#) [2] of online and live events to increase awareness of the life and virtues of [Blessed Pedro Calungsod](#) [3] and generate activities that allow young Filipinos to model the 17th-century martyr's life of service and devotion to the faith. These events stretch through the 100 days before the Oct. 21 canonization of Calungsod in Rome.

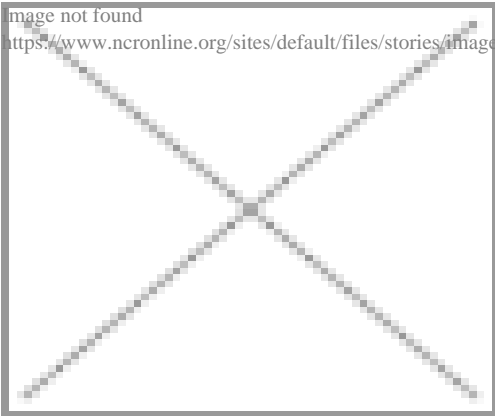
Calungsod, a teenage catechist from the Visayas region in central Philippines, joined the Spanish Jesuit missionaries' mission to the Ladrone Islands in 1668. A native who rejected Christianity killed Calungsod and mission head Fr. Diego Luis de San Vitores on April 2, 1672.

Tagle's keynote speech on social media spirituality highlighted the capability of social networking and social communications to unite people not only in friendship, but in promoting causes.

"We have a cause, and that is the cause of Christ," the bishop said, explaining the responsibility of Christians to build God's kingdom on earth by promoting "truth, love, respect for life and integrity."

"Do not be timid! Part of the spirituality is to proclaim," he said. Without forcing anyone, "proclaim what you believe in ... the joy of being a follower of Christ." Tagle then challenged participants to "be a contagious disease" and "go viral."

Summit speakers and activities tackled use of social networks such as Facebook; media-sharing services, including YouTube and Flickr; microblogging through Twitter; blog comments and forums; bookmarking sites and social news.



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In his presentation, Digital Marketing Consultant Carlo Ople reported

[survey results](#) [4] that show social networking activity by those who use the Internet in the Philippines has increased from 51 percent in 2009 to 82 percent in 2011, bringing social networking to the top of the list of monthly online activities. The survey was conducted in interviews of 1,500 Filipinos ages 10 or older.

"There are more than 28 million Filipino accounts on Facebook, more than 70 percent of them listed as 18 years old and above," Ople said. He estimates the number of active Twitter users in the Philippines at 14 million. Four million are on Multiply, an online shopping website.

Average time spent online jumped from 4.8 hours per week at home in 2009 to 10.4 hours in 2011. The increase is mirrored in smaller levels in school, work and Internet cafes, Ople said. Internet usage increases were highest among the 10- to 19-year-olds, followed by 20- to 29-year-olds. Time online increased most among people in the upper socioeconomic classes.

Tagle in his address wondered whether the rush with which people want to have more Facebook friends and connections through other social media outlets might indicate "a depth of loneliness, of being disconnected." He shared a story of a young adult he met at a youth camp who told him how his "church family" filled in for the vacuum created by an absentee father who had to work overseas.

"Although I'm a bit old-fashioned and I prefer the long process of building friendships, I see (online friendship) as one calling" to reach out to people who are isolated and in need, Tagle said.

"In the use of social media, take the word 'friend' seriously. Don't reduce it to a mere label" or run a contest on having the most number of friends, the bishop said.

"And if you are really a friend, you will not communicate things that will destroy the other. You will be caring, you will look after their good, and you will use the means of social communication to be able to respond to their deep needs rather than make their lives more miserable," he added.

[Tagle's Facebook page](#) [5], managed by Jesuit Communications, had 99,792 likes as of Tuesday.

Tagle acknowledged the potential of Internet and other means of social communications for serving as a "great equalizer" by giving people access to information and knowledge.

"We see in our world the enduring scandal of so much division -- economic division, political, cultural, social, and sadly, religious division, and still sadly, the division among Christians," Tagle said. "Hopefully, sharing information and knowledge through the use of the means of social communications could create a world that is more equitable and access to important things is available to all."

For computer science student Patrick Renz Pula, participation in the summit was money and time well spent.

"I found most helpful Fr. (Stephen) Cuyos' tips on how to use Facebook for evangelization, especially by focusing on Christ and by remembering what I post affects others," said Pula, a leader in Student Catholic Action, a religious organization for youth in the Philippines.

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart [Fr. Stephen Cuyos](#) [6] blogs about his faith and ministry as well as use of new technologies and social media for evangelization.

"Talk about God, share photos to proclaim God's word in an engaging and inspirational way" instead of focusing on yourself, Cuyos told summit-goers. He said his research showed women change profile pictures every two weeks on average, and men every three weeks. He said some post to their profiles simply to report that the person is hungry, sleepy or bored. Be truthful, he added, citing possible over-editing of images or providing false profile or other data. Cuyos also urged social media users to create original content, saying it is the best way to contribute to witnessing to God's word.

He also advocated open-source content and the creation and sharing of applications, including Bible-based applications and games such as [Journey of Jesus](#) [7] and [Journey of Moses](#) [8].

Cuyos advised participants to be discerning and watch videos completely before sharing them. He warned of website tracking functions, such as [PrivateEye.com](#) [9], that could report which websites users visit.

"Leave a footprint that is consistent with the Gospel," Cuyos said.

Cuyos also warned participants to read all contracts before clicking the agree box and to be careful what they post because the content will be online forever.

"Facebook is very easy to hack," he added.

Summit participants were mostly representatives of youth groups, parish communities, schools and organizations and various religious congregations. They also joined workshops on multimedia, apps and gadgets, online marketing and [uShare](#) [10]. Bishop Joel Baylon of Legazpi, chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Youth, closed the summit with a Mass.

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**Links:**

[1] <http://youthpinoy.com/events/event/1st-catholic-social-media-summit-3/>

[2] <http://plusbig.net/>

[3] <http://pedrocalungsod.org>

- [4] <http://www.slideshare.net/janettetoral/digital-philippines-2011-yahoo-nielsen-net-index-highlights>
- [5] <https://www.facebook.com/ArchbishopTagle>
- [6] <http://stephencuyos.com/about-2>
- [7] <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/05/15/journey-of-jesus-the-first-ever-messiah-based-video-game/>
- [8] <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/08/16/moses-journey-now-a-facebook-game/>
- [9] <http://www.privateeye.com/>
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