

Emily Sanna:

Hi. Welcome everyone. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you, Ann. We didn't get time to say hi before we started, but it's really nice to see you.

Ann Garrido:

Likewise to you too.

Emily Sanna:

I'm Emily Sanna and I'm the managing editor of US Catholic. And I'm here with Stephanie Clary, our digital editor, and Ann Garrido, who's author of the new book [#Rules_of_Engagement: 8 Christian Habits for Being Good and Doing Good Online](#). Before we start, I wanted to give all of you watching a quick reminder to please sign up for our email list at uscatholic.org/signup. And that way you can be the first to find out about upcoming live events like this one. So uscatholic.org/signup and we'll also put the link in the comments on Facebook. So let's introduce Ann.

Emily Sanna:

Ann Garrido is an associate professor of homiletics at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis Missouri. Well, her first passion is teaching. For the past 15 years she's found herself increasingly journey into administrative roles, including at various points in times, serving as her school's Director of the DMin in Preaching, Director of MAPS, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Director of Field Education, Director of Distance Learning and Director of the Aquinas Ministry Integration Project.

Emily Sanna:

And now commits half of her time to traveling nationally and internationally. Although that might've changed in the past year, I think, doing conflict education and mediation work with Triad Consulting Group, which was founded by two members of the Harvard Negotiation Project based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is married to a very patient husband and has one son who plays a mean ukulele.

Emily Sanna:

Garrido has served as senior editor of Human Development Magazine and is the author of numerous books, including the award-winning volumes, *Redeeming Administration* and *Redeeming Conflict*, *Let's Talk about Truth* and her newest book that we're here to talk about today, [#Rules_of_Engagement](#). In this new book [#Rules_of_Engagement](#), Ann reminds us that both popes, Benedict and Francis, call on Catholics to see the internet as a mission territory, a place where we can accomplish enormous good. And yet many of us, perhaps without even meaning to, all too often act online in ways unbecoming of a follower of Jesus. Instead of showing compassion and truth, honesty and fellowship in our online actions, we can be mean-spirited inflammatory and untruthful.

Emily Sanna:

In her book, Ann offers eight practices, all of which are rooted in Catholic teaching to help combat this and to help people align their online activity with the gospel call to be Christ's presence in the world. Each chapter of her book includes reflection questions, and simple exercises to help everyone be more mindful about their social media behaviors. Today we are delighted to have Ann here to talk about our responsibility as Christians to be mindful consumers and users of social media and how social media at

its best can bring us closer to God. Let's get started with our questions. So to start off Ann, I was hoping you could just talk a little bit about what inspired you to write this book.

Ann Garrido:

Well, Emily, first off, let me say thank you for the warm welcome. And again, thank you to everybody who's here to be part of the conversation. As you were reading my introduction, the first line, and probably the core thing that I keep holding onto in the way I think about myself is, I'm a teacher of homiletics, which means I love communications. I'm really curious about how communications works and I also, as you noted, I teach at a Dominican school. And for Dominicans, the core of our charism is this word veritas, or truth. And so when I think about where a lot of communication is going on for the people in the pew nowadays, it really is happening on social media. And where I think about where are some of the hottest conversations about truth are happening right now, it's happening on social media. So writing on this topic was something that allowed a couple of different interests of mine to converge.

Stephanie Clary:

So when you wrote this book, Ann, what was your intended audience? We've got a lot of different types of social media and different users. Who did you write this book for?

Ann Garrido:

Any adult Christian. Sometimes I've written, in the past, for a particular group, like administrators or preachers, but this I really meant for any adult Christian.

Emily Sanna:

What do you hope people will get out of doing such an extensive personal social media audit? You really ask people to go in depth in your book about how they use social media. So what's the benefit of being that mindful about your practices online?

Ann Garrido:

That's so true. Somebody was joking, "It's kind of like an examination of conscience around social media usage." Okay, good Lenten book study or something like that. I think for myself, coming from a background in theology, there are these core truths that we hold about God or images that we hold about God, but a lot of times we don't connect. Like, what is it that I believe about God? How does that connect to my daily life? And so for myself, an ongoing goal throughout my life is, how do we bring theology into our day-to-day lives? And again, if I'm living a lot of my life on social media, how should theology be informing my practice there? So for myself, I wanted to look at the intersection. I'm interested in helping people figure out how to live their faith in the most mundane of circumstances.

Stephanie Clary:

You give a lot of very specific recommendations in the book which were all really helpful, but one of the broader things you talk about is this idea of the And Stance. And I was wondering if you could share a little bit about that as a strategy for online discussion?

Ann Garrido:

Yeah. So that's a term that's kind of common in the world of helping people with difficult conversations when we're dealing with questions of intent and impact. So in daily life, when I'm having a conversation

with you, I'm able oftentimes to see, just by your body language or the expression on your face, whether or not what I've said landed, whether or not it made sense in your circumstance, or if I've accidentally stepped on something. One of the things that I think makes social media so difficult is that oftentimes we don't really have a physical... well, never have a physical person right in front of us.

Ann Garrido:

And so it's hard for me to see did I... Like, I'm typing something really quickly just because I'm trying to be fast or I'm texting on my phone at fat thumbs, did I come across sharper than I meant? Did I come across more harshly than I meant? And I can't see how your eyes react on the other side. I can't see what your body does. And so a lot of times I might have really good intentions with what it is that I'm posting online. Like I've got great reasons why I think this would be interesting to you, but what I don't know is the impact that it has on you. I don't know how it strikes you.

Ann Garrido:

And a lot of times what happens is we sanitize our intention. Like, "You shouldn't be hurt because I had a good intention and I meant to be funny." On the flip side of it, oftentimes on social media, we often get our own feelings hurt or we'll look at something and be like, "That's out of line. That's beyond the boundaries," or, "That's not really funny." And in those situations, I'm pretty sure in my own head that the other person intended to be offensive, or that the other person just doesn't have a good sense of humor doesn't know what's good boundary.

Ann Garrido:

So in those particular circumstances what I wanted... Well, to go back to the And Stance, the And Stance is acknowledging that I can have good intentions and it might not land right, and I can be impacted negatively and it doesn't mean that the other person had good intentions. So holding both of those when we talk about our social media presence, I think is really important, rather than picking an either or an or.

Emily Sanna:

So could you kind of take that a step further and play out what that would look like in real life? So let's say you're on social media and a friend or a relative shares a political article that you find really inflammatory. What does a good response to that look like and then what does a poor response to that look like?

Ann Garrido:

Great question. So one of the questions I think we got to raise in general is just, do I even respond back? Because I don't think you have to. I don't think everything that comes across your social media feed, do you necessarily need to respond to, right? And one of the things that's kind of interesting, and this would be maybe a bigger thing you want to talk about is, by responding back, am I actually giving it more attention? So the way that social media algorithms work is that the more we respond back to something the higher it ends up being in other people's feed, and it actually draws more people's attention to the thing, which maybe if we don't agree with this perspective, is not something I actually want to draw more attention to.

Ann Garrido:

So one question is whether or not to reply back on the feed, whether you reply back at all? I think sometimes having no feedback is a feedback in itself. When I put something out there and I don't get anybody liking it and I don't get anything back, it gives me a clue, "Oh, maybe this did not land well." And if it's a relationship that matters to me and one that I want to keep, and I actually am concerned about this other person and how it is that they're thinking and it is impacting me, I might just private message them. And just say, "I can tell you're posting a whole lot about this lately. I'm kind of curious to know why. Like, this doesn't strike me as the person that I know. It sounds like this is really important to you, but I'm curious as to why." Just kind of check it out with the person.

Ann Garrido:

And if it's something that goes on, I also think private messaging is not even the best forum for the conversation. Just call the other person up on the phone, Zoom them, now that we're vaccinated, hopefully, go out for tea, coffee. Just check in with the other person rather than necessarily get into a debate. I don't know that sometimes the platforms are ready to hold the depth of conversation we need to have.

Emily Sanna:

What a radical suggestion. Call them on the phone.

Ann Garrido:

Oh, I know. Who knows how to use a phone anymore?

Stephanie Clary:

So that kind of speaks to where you begin your book with this just general question of asking yourself why you're on social media to begin with, and is this something that I should take offline? So is there a bad or wrong reason to be on social media in the first place?

Ann Garrido:

Fabulous. So underneath everything that I talk about in the book, and this is where I'm talking about, where does theology meet everyday life? For me, as a Christian, theology is grounded. Now this is going to sound crazy when I say it, so bear with me. Theology is grounded. We have a belief that God is Trinity. Okay. You're like, "What on earth is that had to do a social media?" When I say that God is Trinity, it means that God and God's very being is relationality. God and God's very being is relationship. And so when we are baptized in that water, we're dumped underneath that water and it's said, "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," that is a way of saying you, each and every one of us, you are called to live a radically relational life. You are called to participate in God's Trinitarian life.

Ann Garrido:

And so ultimately you are built for a life of communion with God and everything that happens on this planet earth is to prepare you, even right now in your baptism, you are entering into communion with God and all of your interactions on earth are to deepen your capacity to be in communion with God who is Trinity. So where do we learn how to live in communion? By living in community here with each other. And how do we form community with each other is by communication. The whole purpose of communication is to help us to build up our capacity for friendship, for relationship. And our whole purpose for being in relationship and community is to be able to enjoy a forever and divine communion

with each other and God. So any communication, and social media being our current form of communication, any communication is meant to build up relationship, is meant to build up community.

Ann Garrido:

So anything that I'm doing on social media, I always have to be asking myself the question, how is this building up community, or is this actually fragmenting community? How is this building up relationship, or is this actually the death of the relationship that I've got with another person? So unless we're attending... No matter how true I think what it is that I'm saying online, if I'm not also asking the question of, what does it mean to be true here to another person? Somehow what I'm doing, I shouldn't be up there. If it's not for the sake of building up relationship and community, I'm not ready to type anything into the keypad yet. So are there bad reasons for being on social media? Yeah. Any time I'm up there, not intending to build a community, I'm not up there for the right purpose.

Stephanie Clary:

Kind of in the same train of thought then, is there a wrong reason to leave social media? If you're on there and you do the self audit and you just decide, I'm just going to get off altogether. Is that helpful or is that more harmful?

Ann Garrido:

I think that's fascinating. First off, I don't think anybody's got to be on social media. I think it's totally fine. There's other ways to build up human community other than social media. It's just one tool. And I think if you were to say, "My reason for leaving social media is I should wish to be a hermit and in no relationship with anybody else at all," Okay, I mean, that's a bad reason for getting off of social media. But if, my guess is most people would say, "My reason for absencing social media is because I actually want to focus more on the relationships with my family. I really want to focus more on the friends that are face-to-face in front of me. I realize it's not bringing out the best in me. I think those are all fine reasons for leaving social media. I don't think anybody's got to be on it.

Ann Garrido:

I think the challenge is that nowadays more and more of us are finding that it is a useful way to remain in connection with people. A lot of times our work is requiring us to be up there or some of the communities that we're part of have a huge social media presence. So if I'm not up there, I'm missing out on getting information that I need. And it's kind of interesting that within Catholic perspective right now, Pope Francis and Pope Benedict both have a pretty positive perspective on what we could be doing on social media, which is interesting. I don't know whether their perspective has changed now seeing what has happened, but at least in their origin, because some of what they wrote originally almost reads naive in comparison to what we face, but at least in their origin, their early statements, within our tradition, we like to think of it as the possibility of being a place of real grace and communion with each other.

Emily Sanna:

So I actually had a question that came in from someone watching on Facebook, which ties in well to what I was going to ask next.

Ann Garrido:

Okay, great.

Emily Sanna:

So is there a way to communicate well to bridge the generational gaps we encounter online, say between young adults in their twenties and older adults in their sixties who tend to see respective issues from very different perspectives? Or I would add to just use social media really differently in having community?

Ann Garrido:

I love it. Yeah. So I will say part of the reason why I got on social media in the first place was in order to keep an eye on my son who was a middle schooler at the time, because I recognized so much of his interaction was going on online. I wanted, in order to be in contact with the next generation, I knew that I was going to have to get online myself. Now the irony of that is that I think some of the next generation have actually become more judicious in their use about social media, those of us who are older, and that the reasons why we're on social media across generations tend to be a little bit different. Our practices on social media, I think tend to be a little bit different, and our struggles on social media tend to be a little bit different.

Ann Garrido:

So I think we have come to recognize that in order to deal within the modern world, if we want to be in contact with understanding the next generation well, I need to be on social media. And for myself at this point in time and work, I couldn't not be on it. But I do think that across generations, we do face some kind of different struggles with social media. I think for the next generation, and maybe we'll move into talking about this later in the conversation, we know in the literature around addiction in general, with drugs, alcohol, and I would say social media, the younger that you start something, the harder it is to break a pattern. So if you don't start drinking until after 30, the chances of actually developing patterns of alcoholism are minimized tremendously just by starting later.

Ann Garrido:

I think also, for those of us who didn't come into social media until later in life, I think the tendency for us to feel like I need to be online all the time is lessened. I think also those of us who are older tend not to have a big issue with younger people on social media's self-esteem and body. But older people, we don't tend to critique each other's hairstyles or earrings, we don't give fashion comments online to each other in the same way. So I don't think it impacts self-esteem in the same way. And I don't think we experience FOMO, I could be wrong... in quite the same way. Like when I see my friends getting together and I'm not there, it's not like I'm like, "Oh, they left me out." So I don't struggle in that way.

Ann Garrido:

But I think oftentimes where the younger generation is wiser is they look at us and they're like, "Why are you even trying to have political conversations online?" Like, "Why are you thinking you can go back and forth on Twitter and you're going to get somewhere? Why are you even responding to this?" So the purposes for why we're using social media and what we think we're going to be able to accomplish online, I think sometimes younger people are more sage about what's going to be able to be accomplished on social media and what's not, what's useful, what isn't. And that's something... I think those who are not digital natives, we struggle a lot more with questions around fake news, I think, than the younger generation does. So we're kind of dealing with it in slightly different ways. I don't know if I answered the question though. So feel free to follow up on an area that I didn't address.

Emily Sanna:

Yes. And just a clarification, we will have time for more viewer questions at the very end. So please throughout this, if you have any questions, type them into the comments below the video and we will save time at the end for asking other questions that come in.

Ann Garrido:

Sure.

Stephanie Clary:

You mentioned towards the end of your answer there the sort of fake news issue with social media, why is it important for us to understand not just when news might be fake, but also to understand the biases that could be present in news sources?

Ann Garrido:

Yes. So just like I said before, God is Trinity and that means a whole lot and it has implications for me. The other way that within Christian tradition we have often spoken is God is truth. So anything, because this is also a big concept, anything that's untrue out there somehow is actually damaging, not just to my relationship with other people, but my capacity to be in relationship with God. So we as Christians should care a whole lot about truth and about truthfulness and so forth online. This is a place where we can demonstrate we have a high value on truth. Now, one of the things I talked about in the book that to me is one of the key points I was trying to make is, when we're talking about fake news, there's two levels in which we have to talk about that with.

Ann Garrido:

One is a commitment to truth that I have is that I need to make sure that the news that I'm reading, the way that I'm perceiving the world is accurate. So it needs to be factual. And I need to make sure that whatever news sources I've got coming into my own system, that I've checked out the factuality of them. There's no virtue whatsoever in reading news that's not actually... It's just like it doesn't actually exist. So reading things that are not factual that are poorly reported, there's no benefit to me in trying to stretch my imagination like, "Well, I'll read really good accurate news sources and then I'll read fake stuff and somehow truth is going to be found in between." That's not right. I need to make sure first that I'm only reading sources that have high journalistic value to them.

Ann Garrido:

And so I can check things like Ad Fontes Media to make sure I will tend to read things that come in high factuality, but within that, and this goes to your question about bias, there's a lot of facts out there, and which ones I'm considering relevant, which ones I think have more weight, which ones do I think I should be acting on, which ones should be informing the way I'm building a picture of the world? Those will tend to lean in a couple different directions because the world's a big place, and I can't have all of the facts all of the time. And so I want to be able to think about... The way that I perceive facts, the way I perceive reality is shaped by my race, my culture, my religious tradition, by socioeconomic class, the way that I was educated, all kinds of different things, my life experience, my family of origin.

Ann Garrido:

And there's a lot of different ways to read the facts. There's a lot of different ways to interpret them and to figure out which ones are most relevant and meaningful in this situation to figure out a way forward. So while I will only read sources that are highly accurate, I will read sources that come from a multiplicity of different perspectives. So I don't think bias is necessarily a bad word. I do think there's a real value within catholicism, catholicism with a small C meaning universal. I think there's a real value for us to try to get as broad of a perspective as possible.

Ann Garrido:

Now, do I read from the far left or the far right? No, because what they're doing is manipulating the facts and twisting them to a particular agenda. But does it mean that I'll read in this spectrum? Yeah, it does. And if I'm reading a story from a newspaper that leans a little left, I'll try to also read a story about that same topic from a newspaper that leans a little bit right. If I'm reading from something that comes in the US, I'm also going to read about how has that from a high quality news source in another part of the world. That's where we're talking about broadening my perspective.

Emily Sanna:

So given that we all live in these echo chambers on social media, of people who mostly believe like us, do you have any advice for finding that information across the spectrum that is not fake, that we know we can trust?

Ann Garrido:

Yeah. So I've subscribed to a couple of high quality news sources that I know because they regularly appear if I check it like on Media Bias/Fact Check or if I check it on Ad Fontes, I know they regularly appear as accurate news sources, and so then I'll subscribe to a couple that are in the middle and then a little bit of swing in both directions. If an article comes in and I don't recognize the source, I either go right past it or before I give it any credibility, definitely before I share it, I go and check out what is the backstory on this as a source. And I try to give very little time to don't pay attention to it, don't even write back, just let it sink in my algorithm.

Ann Garrido:

I think what you raise though, Emily, is a really challenging question is then, do I end up getting into a kind of like an echo chamber because I myself, my friends oftentimes think in a very similar vein as I might think about stuff. So when I'm thinking about my friendship group, do I particularly look out for who are friends I've got that I just want to make sure I'm not going to unfriend them because I disagree with this, because oftentimes they bring a slightly different perspective than what I would bring. And so is my friendship group wide enough that I'm getting a diversity of different perspectives? And even from the news sources that I've chosen. Like I said, I've still already cultivated it to make sure that there's some diversity of perspective there.

Ann Garrido:

That being said, with the echo chamber, one of the things that we're finding out about the way that the algorithms on platforms are built is that even when the platforms try to put into our newsfeed cross information, like information from other perspectives, what they find is that the users oftentimes don't engage that information. And so sometimes... I do think, and maybe we'll get into this, but I do think that news platforms, or not news platforms, social media platforms do have an obligation to try to not create echo chambers, but sometimes user choice reinforces the echo chambers.

Ann Garrido:

Because we as users, the goal of the social media platform, the business model, is to keep a user on as long as possible because that's how they're going to raise the most ad money. And they know that users stay on longer when they're given information that they know that that user has clicked on before and that they're interested in. So it keeps us in this circle, they're going to keep giving us more of what we want. So the most helpful thing we could do would be to conscientiously on our own, choose some other things to read, but do it wisely.

Stephanie Clary:

We had another question come in from somebody who's watching asking if there are social media platforms that, just by the way they're set up, are better at communicating truthfully than others?

Ann Garrido:

That's a great question. So my first answer to be all honest is, I don't know. I have some intuitions around this, but I don't know. I think one of the challenges right now is that different platforms are serving slightly different audiences and they're intended for slightly different kinds of conversation. And one of the challenges is that the way that platforms are set up period, I'm not sure that they're intended... I'm not sure that the platforms themselves have enough heft for the depth of the kinds of conversations that we're trying to have on them.

Ann Garrido:

And as far as I know, all of the platforms have a similar business model, which is they're trying to keep you up there as long as possible in order for them to be able to get as much ad monies as possible, because we're not paying for them. So a platform that is, and I know we're not really interested in this as the consumer, but any platform that's really going to be designed for human conversation is going to have to have, underneath it, a different sort of business model, which means that we are probably going to need to pay for it. And so I think, like in university settings, how far do you extend what constitutes as social media? But there are definitely platforms that are more built for human conversation, but they tend not to be built within the same business model. And then they're also not going to be as popular.

Emily Sanna:

So that ties into another question that I had which was, whose responsibility is it to be ethical, the users or the platforms? So as an example, people in my church were debating really seriously whether the church as a whole should get off Facebook because the whole thing surrounding fake news and the election and all of that. And the fact like what you said, the platform exists to make us stay on, it exists to make money. And so there was a very vocal group of people who said, "No, we should not be on Facebook. We should not be having conversations on Facebook." The flip side of that being of course is, part of how the community maintains itself, especially in this past year, has been through Facebook group. So do people of faith have the responsibility to not only use social media responsibly, but also make sure that the platforms themselves are acting ethically? And where are the boundaries between that responsibility?

Ann Garrido:

That's a really good question. So in one way, it's a question of the chicken and the egg, or you could say the green forest and the green trees. I think the question is the responsibility obviously is on both. And when I've written on it, I was just asking it from a personal point of view, what could I do on social

media? There are other movements that are larger and collective, like for example, that movie, *The Social Dilemma*, that's been out, which is excellent, which is looking at like, collectively. There are some issues that are so big that we're not going to be able to solve them individually. We're going to have to do them collectively. And it's going to have to be by some form of regulation. It's going to have to be by some large social action.

Ann Garrido:

So when the forest is green, it's easier for the trees to be green, and the question is, how does the forest get green? It's like, well, the trees are green and then it creates a green forest. It's like this back and forth and back and forth. Whether or not boycotting would work, I think is a really interesting question. On one hand, if I thought we had a capacity to make an impact, I would be supportive of that. The parallel in my own mind that comes to mind there is like, so for a little while in my own family's history, my husband's actually originally from Guam, and they don't have the right to vote in national elections. And so my husband, when we moved to the states here, he was like, "Well, I'm not going to vote as a way of showing protest against the US government." And I was like, my guess is that the US government is not going to notice, "You know what? That guy's not voting. We should call him up and try to find out what is going on."

Ann Garrido:

So my suspicion is that Facebook is so large that the question of, if a group of people boycott it, let's just say 30 people join in and be like, "We're not going to get on social media." They might do that for their own health and wellbeing, and I'd be totally in favor of that. But in terms of, does that have the capacity to impact the situation? I don't think Facebook is going to call us and be like, "I think we're missing 20 people from Kansas City or Minnesota." They're not even going to notice it. So I wonder sometimes whether our greater impact is actually to be on social media calling attention to these things on a regular basis that, that might be more impactful. Now, I don't know that for sure, but that would be... My suspicion is that the collective action is actually going to have to take place on social media, whether we like it or not.

Stephanie Clary:

Another listener question, especially when we're talking about boycotting and the influence we can make, is it possible we're taking social media too seriously and does that take away from our greater conversation about Christian community in the world? So I'm wondering if maybe taking that listeners question into the direction of, what role does social media play here at its best and then also, maybe at its worst?

Ann Garrido:

I get a little bit depressed when I say this, but at this stage in the game, I don't think we can take social media too seriously as a people, as a community. The impact that it is having right now is so strong on the next generation of how people are communicating with each other. It's so strong right now on our national, or like whether or not democracy is going to exist into the future. It's so strong on the consumer front and how consumerism and the way that algorithms are going to determine human behavior and consumer behavior on to the future. It is having so much impact that I don't think we can take it seriously enough. That being said, again, do I think at the individual level that each person or that every church needs to be on it, every parish needs to be, like that needs to be their focus? No, I really don't.

Ann Garrido:

But I do think it is going to present the biggest theological questions that we are going to be asking as a church on to the future, which I find scary, but I do think we have to take it really seriously. And each of us needs to decide how much time and energy can I give to these topics. So one of the things, which I do really think about a lot in the closing of the book is, how much time am I going to spend on social media? How much time do I want to spend on social media? Because I think there's a difference also between saying how much time am I going to spend on social media and how much time am I going to deal with the bigger questions around social media in our society? I think it's possible to, but a lot of the way those questions are going to be handled in the future are going to be through the social media platform [inaudible 00:36:58].

Ann Garrido:

So I think I still want to ask us as Christians to keep raising, even on social media, the big questions around how much face-to-face time have you had with your family? When's the last time you saw somebody in-person? What's the impact of social media on your own health and wellbeing? Is it detracting from your sleep? Is it keeping you from exercising? Is it keeping you from prayer? I mean, I think all those questions are really big, huge questions and we've got to moderate our own use on social media, for sure.

Emily Sanna:

So kind of same topic but changing the scale a little bit, about your own safety and health when it comes to social media. Going back to your approach with how to deal with people who you disagree with, you promote this very generous approach, talking to people one-on-one, going off social media, giving them a call. And yet I can imagine there are instances where it's not just an issue of disagreement, it's an issue of your human dignity is at stake depending on what the other person has posted. And so is there a way to have those conversations to show that generosity in those situations while also remaining safe, mentally and kind of physically almost, when it comes to these issues of racism, homophobia, like these big identity questions that there are people of good faith who strongly disagree.

Ann Garrido:

Yeah. I mean, Emily, this is where the rubber meets the road, isn't it? Great. So there's stuff that gets posted on social media that I vehemently, vehemently disagree with, that I consider fundamentally antithetical to core Christian values that I [inaudible 00:38:53]. You've named a couple of these things. I think one of the things, which I would say is my own human dignity is never dependent on what somebody else has online. I consider that coming from God and that's rooted in myself, and they don't give it to me or take it away from me. And that being said, so I entirely disagree with something, I entirely think it's untrue. I entirely think that there should be greater monitoring of what gets put out. Like what social media platforms should be responsible for keeping containers on accuracy around stuff. And the bigger question like, what do I actually have control over is, what do I think is the best way of engaging with that?

Ann Garrido:

So one of the things which I will do, if something comes across that is patently inaccurate and unfactual, there are things that you can do to click on it, just like up in the top right-hand corner with the three little dots that says something like, "This post is..." And just alert Facebook to it or alert Twitter to it. You can take that if, I think, it's inaccurate. You're asking more questions, I think around different... So like

some of the stuff around anti-vax stuff. I've done that on stuff that's come through. Some of the stuff you're asking is more on the question of political perspective and so forth.

Ann Garrido:

Again, I can engage the other person if I want to, in the conversation, that's one option. I could try that on social media, or I could try it off social media if it's something that's concerning to me. If I actually, like I said before, don't want to give more credence to it, one of the more helpful things I can do is not to respond to it because that actually, the more I respond to something, the more people respond to something, the higher it goes in the algorithms because the social media platforms think, "Oh, this is keeping people's attention. Let's draw more attention to it." So I oftentimes don't. One of my conscientious lines is going to be, "Don't draw attention to it."

Ann Garrido:

I can also repost. I can post a new thread on a topic and start the topic all over again so that it doesn't go down a negative spiral. So I can post things that I think are information that people should have in the other direction. And I can frame those conversations in terms of like, "Hey, if we're going to comment on this, this is what I'd be especially interested to hear about. Let's make sure we don't sink into ad hominem attacks here," like that sort of stuff. So I think we don't... There's a couple different ways and we're not locked into one way of having to respond to a conversation.

Stephanie Clary:

How can our social media use... We've talked a lot about how it can, hopefully, at its best, bring us closer together with each other, connect us when we can't physically meet, even serve as kind of a parish space when our churches have been closed. How can social media bring us closer to God?

Ann Garrido:

Well, one thought is that God as communion, anything that brings us into deeper communion with each other, also brings us into deeper communion with God, and anything that fragments our relationship with other people, also fragments our relationship with God. Those are so closely linked in my estimation. So for myself, how has social media helped, I think, deepen me spiritually? There's a lot of great stuff out there that I read online. There's a number of great Catholic publications that I regularly read because I'm on the move a lot. I don't carry magazines around with me as much anymore. I'm most likely to maintain my ongoing education around what's going on in church, is from a couple, not all, but a couple of very high quality publications. I'm reading those through my newsfeed, and those, I think, have helped keep me educated around my own faith life. I think that's been real helpful for my faith life.

Ann Garrido:

I can see I've come closer to God because people will post things they want me to pray for, or I can ask for prayers on social media. I think that's been helpful for my relationship with God. I think it's helped me to keep in contact with some people that otherwise I would have totally let go of in my life, who have continued to broaden my perspective around things that are going on in other parts of the country or the world that I wouldn't have known about if it wasn't for social media. And in that sense, it's drawing me closer to truth. So all of those are possibilities, I think, for how we get closer to God or fall away from God on social media.

Emily Sanna:

So I want to make sure that we leave some time for viewer comments, but I have one more question I want to ask you first, which is that if people are feeling overwhelmed by the scope of what you ask them to reflect on in your book, do you have one or two suggestions of ways that they can get started being more mindful about the way they're using social media?

Ann Garrido:

That's awesome. I mean, the great thing about the eight habits I talked about in the book is that they don't have to go in any particular order. So you could just pick a chapter a month to look at, or like maybe over Lent again or Advent or something, or one a week or something like that to reflect on. You don't have to read them all at the same time. The other thing you can do is the chapters can stand independent of each other. And so what I would say is you can go in and just pick, because as we talked about earlier, we each have different challenge zones.

Ann Garrido:

So for me, I can really quickly get wrapped up in the... because I'm a little bit of a news junkie, I can get a little bit wrapped up in the truth question. So I probably need to check my social media feed, especially around that, and so I need chapter two. If the struggle for me more is, I struggle with getting off of social media, then I would say, read the chapter that's related to that. So we could each just pick one zone that we wanted to be intentional and work with and you don't have to do them in order. You can start in any place.

Emily Sanna:

Thank you. So we have a couple more questions, I think more are coming in and please, if you're watching, please type in your questions to the comments. We're getting them as they come in. So here is one, when it comes to anti-racism work specifically, is it wise to involve social media in that, or is that more of an individual personal in-person journey?

Ann Garrido:

So one of the ways that we, I always talk about social media as a huge platform for learning, and the more that we see our friends are very interested in a particular topic and we see what they're reading, we begin to maybe take an issue with greater seriousness. So I would say I have a number of friends who've been really, really active in anti-racist efforts. And they post about things that they're reading regularly online. And they gave me some really great stuff to read. So I find that I have definitely learned and grown from people being willing to take strong stances on that online.

Ann Garrido:

Is it helpful to actually try to debate people? So if you've posted something and people fight back and they debate back and forth, is that a helpful venue in which to do anti-racism work? Probably not. What I would do in that situation is if somebody posts back something on something that you've posted and wants to debate with you back and forth, you could just post in there, "It sounds like what I posted really hit you the wrong way or it's not resonating with you. I'd be really curious to have a conversation with you to find out a little bit more about what's going on because I want to understand more what your experiences and where you're coming from and why this lands so badly with you. Is it okay if I give you a call?" And just kind of take that offline, because the debating heads thing, I don't think is moving the conversation forward, but the sharing of really high quality information, I think that makes a big difference.

Stephanie Clary:

This is another question that came in. We hear sometimes, especially around Lent, like you've mentioned a few times, people talk about taking these social media breaks. Is that helpful or are there other ways that can help us avoid this kind of burnout that we also hear people talk about in terms of how we use social media?

Ann Garrido:

I think taking a break and doing the social media fast, I think that's fabulous. I think it's really good. Every once in a while... It's kind of interesting, the research on what leads to change of behavior is that something has to be a pattern for at least 30 days to really change a behavior. And so when I come back to it after 30 days, it's like kind of hitting a restart button or reset, and I think 40 days all the better. So I think Lent every year for so many of us becomes a kind of a reset button for us to recognize, am I sinking into some pretty compulsive behavior there that I'm having a hard time shaking? And just like we could do that with food or drink, we can do that with social media and we can come back with a different perspective or a different lens.

Ann Garrido:

And we might actually need a profound period of fasting in order to hit that reset button. And I think Lent is a great time to do that, but I don't think you got to wait until lent. If you recognize you're sinking into some behavior like, "Gosh, darn it. I recognize I've been doing a lot of scrolling. I need to reset." I don't think you have to wait 'til Lent to do that.

Ann Garrido:

So there's a number of things, when I was trying to do some research on helping people break bad habits on social media, definitely one of the things that gets regularly brought up is to make sure you've turned off notification. We know that bright colors tend to be eye candy, so our eyes are attracted to bright colors. And so it's not a mistake that notifications on our phone pop up in red, because it will draw your eyes to it. Another thing that people have tried beyond turning off notifications is to go gray screen because it's a little less tempting. It less draws our eyes over there. There's ways to do that on our phones. There's ways of setting a timer for yourself. There's some apps that actually exist to get you off of social media if you realize that you're doing it compulsively. I mean, there's a variety of different techniques that are out there now to help hit reset for ourselves.

Emily Sanna:

So what social media accounts do you personally use and how have you found them useful in different ways?

Ann Garrido:

I have two Facebook... Okay. So the average, this is going to be horrifying. The average American has eight social media accounts, but part of it has to do with, what do you call social media? Like what do you constitute as social media? So I have two Facebook accounts, one professional, and one private or personal. I have a Twitter account, which I'm very bad about using. I may as well not even say that I have a Twitter account. And then I have WhatsApp because that's the place where my family communicates with each other, but is that really social media? I don't know. It doesn't have the same ring to it because it serves a really different purpose in my life.

Ann Garrido:

YouTube. Some people debate whether or not YouTube actually should really count as a social media platform or not. If you're just up there watching a video, occasionally, it's not really for conversation back and forth, but if you're subscribed and you're actually commenting, then it constitutes a social media platform. I've been thinking about Instagram because that's where all my nieces and nephews are going, but I'm not there yet. So I probably am actually less of a social media user than most, but the statistics are saying that people have an average of eight accounts and that the statistics are that the average American spends two hours and six minutes a day on social media right now. I don't, but I guess it also depends. Are there some days I do? I'm sure there are. But hopefully most days that's a little bit high for me.

Emily Sanna:

So we have one last question that came through which are, what are some of the things we might hope for in the future of social media, in relation to the future of our individual and collective behavior on these platforms?

Ann Garrido:

I think some of the impact of social media, again, that's well documented in The Social Dilemma movie, which is on Netflix, and I'd encourage watching it, are only really going to be able to be handled collectively. And my hope is that we will rise to that level and figure out ways of acting collectively on some of the most important things that are impacting us as a society and to the next generation.

Ann Garrido:

I also would hope that we personally will see more the impact of our behavior on social media on our own health and wellbeing in our own relationships with each other and that all of us... So for example, one of the things I do in the book is I set up a page for, let's all hold each other accountable to saying these are eight practices that I promise I will be hold. My hope is that each of us at an individual level will also arrive at some new standards or norms around how we show up as a person who claims to be Christian online.

Ann Garrido:

The other hope I would have is somewhere in between those two. I hope that within our school and educational systems, we had just simply become more savvy and knowledgeable about social media and how it works, and that communications and social media norms and citizenship will begin to form part of the curriculum of all of us. So there's some great stuff that's coming out, like Digital Citizenship Curriculum from Common Sense Media. It has lesson plans for kindergarten through 12th grade. There's a great college course that's now up online. It has a bad word in it and I'm not sure I'm able to stay on a good magazine's website, but Calling Bullshit, that's a great thing that you can look up online. It's a college course for teaching college students on how to be more savvy around how data is being managed online.

Ann Garrido:

John Green has a great set of videos that are hilarious for watching, that could be really helpful for high school on up. So just, I hope that we're all going to do more and again, and because of the church's commitment to truth, I hope that the church will become part of this as part of its social justice platform of building up a more just world, we're going to need to become more conscientious and offer more

educational opportunities for parishioners and so forth around social media as a Christian issue of concern.

Stephanie Clary:

Thank you. We've had a few listeners saying they're inspired to read the book. So could you let them know where they can find the book, and then also maybe where they could find that pledge you talked about that they can commit to if they feel like it?

Ann Garrido:

Yeah. So my website is anngarrido.com, real creative and innovative there. But on the front page of the website, there this space where it just says, I want to take the pledge, and you just click there. And I should say your email information is not shared or anything like that. It doesn't go up online. Just your name and where you're from is on there. And what I invite is just ask one other person to be your accountability partner and do it with you. And that if you guys are social media friends, to be able to say like, "When I see you do something I think is out of boundaries, here's an emoji I'm going to send you as a secret cue that says, 'Hey, I think you stepped out of bounds here.'" And if I do that, I put up on my website, what you can put on my Facebook feed to let me know, "Ann, I think this might not be true. You should pay more attention to this."

Ann Garrido:

And then the book you can get at, my publisher has been Ave Maria Press. They've always got some great resources up on their website and great discounts at varying points in time during the year. And then you can also get it through Amazon or Barnes & Noble, whatever your preferred mode is. It comes as an ebook as well as a hard copy.

Emily Sanna:

Well, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us this afternoon. This has been great. For those of you who are listening, we're going to post the recording to this. It will stay up on our Facebook wall and we'll also post it on YouTube and on our website. So if you've subscribed to us on YouTube or you can visit our website, and at some point we'll have a transcript up as well, so that if you are not a video person, because not all of us are, you can read the text. And again, just one last plug, subscribe to our email to get videos like this and alerts about future events. And you can sign up at uscatholic.org/signup. And that's all we have time for, because it's almost 2:00. So thank you again, Ann, and thank you for everyone for listening and this has been really great.

Ann Garrido:

Oh, thanks for the invitation. And thanks to US Catholic. That's great.