AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROLINE CERVENY, SSJ

Caroline Cerveny has served as a member of Saint Leo University Ministry team since August, 2003. She brings over 20 years of teaching and 18 years of educational technology experience to her Internet and technology workshops and classes. Sr. Caroline has been involved in educational technology since 1984. She brings the experience of teaching at the high school and college levels, involvement in parish religious education as a diocesan director and consultant, and parish pastoral associate.She has written articles that focus on educational technology in catechetical ministry for publications including Catechist magazine, Liturgical Catechesis, Momentum, Today's Parish, and the NCCL Newsletter.

Harcourt Religion Publishers: You've recently made some changes in your work. Would you share with readers?

Caroline Cerveny: For me work is ministry that responds to a call! Today's call rings loud and clear to serve ministers who want to be involved in 21st Century Catechetical Ministry. My previous call involved ministry with young adults and faculty at the university level.

HRP: You are in the process of developing a company, Interactive Connections. Tell us about it.

CC: I'm excited to share my vision and expertise with catechetical ministers with faith-based educational technology. Interactive Connections focuses on the training and formation of catechetical ministers through webinars or workshops, online classes, and an annual conference.

HRP: How did you personally become an apostle for digital technology? What did you find so compelling, in the 80's (when you first began to advocate what has become, for many in today's world), the primary or preferred way of communication and knowledge gathering?

CC: Like Paul, I was knocked off my horse, well not literally! I was in a Radio Shack store in Chicago's Hyde Park in October, 1983, when I met a 12-year old boy who excitedly told me everything he knew about the computer he was working on in a corner of the store. As I walked out of the store door, I realized I was "outdated" despite my involvement in Youth Ministry and Parish Life. I couldn't walk the walk or talk the talk of this 12-year old boy. I immediately realized that I needed to learn more about this big plastic box—called a computer! More importantly, that experience taught me that the Faith can no longer be handed on the same way any more.

HRP: You have worked with high school students and college students as well as in parish religious educations programs with pastoral teams, parish ministers, DREs, catechists, principals, teachers, and administrative assistants—how has this helped you to understand the necessity of web technology as a teaching and formation tool?

CC: At this time in my life I feel like a "seasoned" minister with an understanding of parish catechetical ministry at a variety of levels. In addition, teaching university courses, writing, and research allows me to mentor today's catechetical minister. The 21st Century is unique and today's catechetical minister must minister in the 21st Century environment. Today, the Internet and online learning enhance what we are able to do in a face-to-face format. However, I do not advocate e-learning as the sole focus in ministry. We need a blended approach that engages the faith learner!

HRP: In an article on cyberfaith.com you were quoted as saying: "For me to capture the spirit of St. Francis is to be a Communicator of the Word! What better way to do this in today's world by the Internet, by multimedia, by using wonderful electronic tools we have in hand to communicate God's story." Can you elaborate?

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Religion Publishers

CC: In 1224 St. Francis originated the first Christmas CRÈCHE, using real people and animals on Christmas Eve to tell the Nativity story. The living Gospel scenes serve as an example of participatory storytelling! Today we are able to involve our children in Digital Storytelling, so that they are creating and telling the faith-stories of Noah, Moses, the Nativity, the Crucifixion and more in their own language and culture! They can use a variety of digital tools and web-based options to relive the stories of our faith-tradition. When you are the storyteller, you can engage the learner in participatory media!

Why do we want participatory learning? Similar to the paradigm shift when Gutenberg invented the printing press, today we are engaged in a totally new media culture, where young people expect to express themselves through digital words, sounds, and images!

HRP: I am sure readers would love to know some of your favorite digital products and resources they might find useful, too.

CC: For Digital Storytelling, I have discovered some wonderful free tools like:
• MS Photostory
• MS Windows Movie Maker or Pinnacle VideoSpin http://videospin.com/Redesign
• I also like Pinnacle Studio ULTIMATE as a digital video editing tool

For those of us who are looking for free collaborative tools, you will find the following of interest to you:
• Scrapblog: http://www.scrapblog.com
• PhotoShow: http://www.photoshow.com/home/start
• BubbleShare: http://www.bubbleshare.com
• Voice Thread (For free version you need a school/parish email address:
   http://voicethread.com/help/forum/comments.php?DiscussionID=32&page=1)

If you are interested in the 50 potential online tools that are available for Digital Storytelling, go to
http://cogdogroo.wikispaces.com/Dominoe+50+Ways

HRP: You have offered a variety of workshops that encourage attendees to integrate technology into their ministry settings. Can you briefly discuss/list some of the most effective and efficient strategies?

CC: To integrate technology into your ministry settings, you need to consider the following:
• If you are not a Digital Native, challenge yourself to become a Digital Immigrant. (See Marc Prensky's article to learn more about Digital Natives, and Digital Immigrants: http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/.
• Join a faith-based educational technology social network website like http://digitalcatechesis.ning.com to collaborate and share insights with your peers.
• Learn all that you are able about educational technology. A good place to start is to explore what is happening in our everyday educational environments via the International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE). Learn about the Student and Teacher Standards at http://www.iste.org
• Most importantly, involve your students as digital participants. For more about this, see the MacArthur Foundation report " Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century" at http://digitallearning.macfound.org

HRP: In your article "Find and Use Collaborative Learning Tools on the Internet" (April/May 2009 Religion Teacher's Journal) you write to the digitally challenged: "Don't worry about catching up" in the Internet world, further commenting that there will always be something new to learn in technology. Do you view the

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Religion Publishers

anxiety of feeling unable to catch up to be one of the main reasons some catechists are hesitant to take advantage of all that new media has to offer? How can this be solved?

CC: Many folks are comfortable with the tried and true! It worked for us! However, the world around us has changed radically and today's students are Digital Natives. Anxiety decreases when folks get hands on experiences. The "hands on experience" becomes an opportunity to invite our students to partner with us. We need to say "Could you show me how to do PowerPoint?," "Could you show me how you "text" your friends?," "Could you show me how you put together a Digital Story in school? How did you do this?" In addition, those who are very interested in Digital Catechesis need to network and support one another. Come and attend the Interactive Connections Gathering, where we will focus on faith-based educational technology and best practices. Contact me at c.cerveny@verizon.net for information about this gathering that is scheduled for January 12 (eve) thru January 15 (eve) in Orlando, Florida.

HRP: What about catechists currently without computer access in the classroom? How do you encourage them and their students to fully participate in this digital 21st century?

CC: This is today's challenge! Our parishes need to become 21st Century Parishes where technology is an integral part of parish life! We need to rethink what tools we have available to us in order to minister to today's parishioner regardless of their age. In fairness and equality, this technology world needs to be accessible to all in the parish—especially every catechist!

Until this happens, we need to be creative and "think outside of the box." Become familiar with what is available. The norm of most students is the following: Home Internet Access, a cell phone (sometimes a Smart Phone), Email account, XBox, iPod, Wii, and who knows what else!

Just using one or two of these tools, you may:

- Communicate with your students/families with a class focused website, blog, or wiki. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Religion has a wonderful service for parish catechists to communicate with their students/families.
- Invite students to "text message" their favorite Scripture verse to their parents, grandparents, or aunt and uncle.
- Explore the http://www.quia.com service where you can create online interactive games, surveys, and more with this tool. E-mail the link to your students.
- Direct students to web-based services like Scrapblog, PhotoShow, BubbleShare, or VoiceThread to create Digital Stories. Invite parents to get involved with their child in creating the story and posting it online via your class website and/or feature these links on your parish website.

HRP: I read that you recommend catechists to seek out a young adult to serve as a mentor as one explores the digital world. Tell us more.

CC: Why not! They are the Digital Natives—the user pro's so to say! What is so wonderful is that they love to show off and share what they know with their mentors—parents, teachers, catechists, and so on!

HRP: You refer to the students as Digital Natives. Tell readers more about this interesting concept and also tell us about Digital Citizens and Digital Immigrants.

CC: Marc Prensky, an internationally acclaimed speaker, writer, consultant, futurist, visionary, and inventor in the critical areas of education and learning developed these concepts.

Prensky offers this description: Today's students—K through college—represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology. Hard to imagine, but they have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age.

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Religion Publishers

What should we call these "new" students of today? Some refer to them as the N-[for Net]-gen or D-[for digital]-gen. But the most useful designation Marc finds for them is Digital Natives. Our students today are all "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet.

So what does that make the rest of us? Those of us who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many of the new technologies are Digital Immigrants, according to Prensky.

The importance of the distinction is this: As Digital Immigrants learn—like all immigrants, some better than others—to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their "accent," that is, their foot in the past. The "digital immigrant accent" can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for information second rather than first, or in reading the manual for a program rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us to use it. Today's older folk were "socialized" differently from their kids, and are now in the process of learning a new language. And a language learned later in life, scientists tell us, goes into a different part of the brain.

Digital Citizenship is being a cyber-responsible person. Matt Villano, in his article "Text Unto Others… As You Would Have Them Text Unto You" http://www.thejournal.com/articles/23225) says "It's nothing anyone would have thought necessary to do only a decade ago, but the concept of citizenship no longer exists only within the realm of the physical world. With K-12 students seeming to at all times have one foot in the real world and one in the virtual, school districts are starting to acknowledge a new collective responsibility: to teach kids what it means to be a good digital citizen and how to go about being one. The answer follows the same rules entrenched in the prescription for being a good citizen on the ground: "Obey the law, have respect for others, act civilly, and sensibly."

HRP: Speaking of Digital Natives, you mention it is imperative for catechists to "walk their walk and talk their talk" (their being the students). What is the danger of not? And do you see these obstacles beginning to dissolve as digital technology becomes more mainstream?
CC: The danger—we are boring! It will take time to become mainstream. The average educator takes five years to become proficient in learning technology—and that is with consistent training opportunities and being a curious educator. We are not formally training our catechetical ministers in the digital environment, no matter how informally we are picking up what we need to know. However, that is not sufficient. What we need are supportive and collaborative learning groups to nurture one another to learn this new language and to adapt to this emerging media world!

HRP: For those wary of online resources and products, do you have some general guidelines they can follow to "play online" safely, ensuring they find the best and most acceptable resources?
CC: In an article that I wrote "Natives and Neanderthals: Digital Learning in Religious Education" (January/February 2008, Catholic Teacher) I highlighted basic points to consider when looking for credible, reliable, and non-biased online Catholic Theology/Religion resources. They are:

- Credible Writer—Who is writing this information? Someone who is recognized for their theological expertise? Affirmed by their colleagues? Are they an expert in a theological area?
- Credentials—What background and resources do they bring to their written work? Where have they gone to school?
- Contact & Communication—Is it possible to contact the writer or publisher?
- Recommendation by reliable source—One of the easiest ways to discover who may be linked to or recommends this web source is by typing the URL into a search engine like http://google.com. For example, type

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Religion Publishers

in "vatican.va" in the Google search field and begin to explore who has the Vatican link on their website. Then determine what organization links back to the Vatican. Who or what do these organizations represent? In this case you will find dioceses, parishes, and corporations like Catholic publishers linked to the Vatican.

• Content—Is the content fair and balanced or is it biased and one-sided? Just as in the political arena, some will call particular individuals or groups liberal or conservative. For our part, we need to remember that both sides bring gold and shadow to the conversation. Thus we need to stay in the conversation instead of deter mining that one is right and the other is wrong. Both sides have gold which when brought together through dialogue allows unbiased truth to emerge.

• Catholic—Even the American Bishops, when on June 16, 2000 they published their statement "Your Family in Cyberspace," said "Just because you can find it on the web doesn't mean it's true; and just because a site uses 'Catholic' in its name doesn't mean it reflects the teaching and practice of the Catholic faith." "Let the buyer beware" applies very much in this case.

• Copyright —Is the information current? The Catholic Encyclopedia is a historical piece whose copyright dates from 1914-1917. Currently, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents the best of the Church's Vatican II theology. (Note the CCC is online at - http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm)

• Correctness—Are the facts correct? It is often important to triangulate your resources. That is, find two different resources to assure that the information in your resource is credible, reliable, and non-biased.

HRP: Just for fun—What are the popular Web 2.0 forums you partake in? For example, are you a fan of the ever-so-popular Facebook?

CC: I have a Facebook account, but many of my friends do not use Facebook. I've created a NING social network in the area for those interested in Digital Catechesis (come to http://digitalcatechesis.ning.com/ to join in the networking opportunities). Plaxo/Pulse is an address book with "Pulse," a new way to enrich your connection with the people in your life. Pulse is a bit like some social networks you've heard of, but it's different in several key ways… The best for me is that I can remember birthdays, because I get reminded a week ahead of time by the service! The Global Education Collaborative (see http://globaleducation.ning.com/) is a community for teachers and students interested in global education. RezEd (http://www.rezed.org/) is an online hub providing practitioners using virtual worlds with access to the highest quality resources and research in the field to establish a strong network of those using virtual worlds for learning.

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