

## **A Preliminary Overview of Social Media and Digital Platforms for Evangelization of Catholic Social Teaching**

Pope Saint John Paul II created CAPP to “promote and defend the knowledge and practice of the Church’s social doctrine”, noting that we are, in fact, “A singular response to the invitation I offered in the Encyclical which inspired this group.” (*Message to the Members of the “Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation”, 5 July 2003*)

He further said: “The Church’s social teaching is itself a valid instrument of evangelization.” (*Centesimus Annus, 54*)

To do this successfully we must, as St. Paul understood, speak in language understandable to the peoples being addressed. (“[So] as to win over as many as possible.... I have become all things to all, to save at least some.” (*1 Corinthians 9:19, 22*) Today, that is the language of the digital world:

“[N]ew technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much so that it could be said that we are living through a period of vast cultural transformation...a new way of learning and thinking, with unprecedented opportunities for establishing relationships and building fellowship.” (*Pope Benedict XVI, 45th World Communications Day*)

He went on to stress that:

- “God’s loving care for all people in Christ must be expressed in the digital world”
- “[T]here exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world” and “we must be aware that the truth which we long to share does not derive its worth from its “popularity” or from the amount of attention it receives. We must make it known in its integrity, instead of seeking to make it acceptable or diluting it. It must become daily nourishment and not a fleeting attraction”.
- “Even when it is proclaimed in the virtual space of the web, the Gospel demands to be incarnated in the real world and linked to the real faces of our brothers and sisters, those with whom we share our daily lives.”

Fr. McShane, President of Fordham University, in his opening remarks to the Dublin Process meeting in New York in March of 2018, also emphasized the need to communicate in the language of the students, stressing that their primary mode of communication is now digital. Consequently, he told us, we need a vibrant digital presence for our message to be heard.

The CAPP group in the USA has accepted these challenges and undertaken a project to evangelize the Church’s social teachings in the digital sphere.

Key to accomplishing this is a two-part plan:

1. Developing an informative website where the beauty and transformative power of Catholic social teaching (CST) can be accessed and understood, and;
2. A social media strategy (specifically on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) to attract interest and direct users to the website - where in-depth material and resources are available on CST.

## How We Went About This

Following a review of proposals from several companies we selected Yellow Line Digital, which has a particular “Catholic” experience and expertise in digital communications and marketing, to partner with us.

Our early development work was driven by several factors:

Overcoming Complexity – the website should present CST in simple and easy-to understand terms.

Compatibility – CST must provide answers to concerns that the individual finds relevant. The website should show how CST effectively address problems and concerns affecting individuals and society.

Relative advantage – CST needs to be seen as superior to other approaches. The website should demonstrate why CST offers insights and solutions superior to other ‘philosophical’ approaches.

Observability – the benefits of applying CST must be observed by others: who else is using CST and why.

Trial-ability – the degree to which CST can be tried on a limited basis. The website should show how interested people can easily learn more about CST – easily and at low cost.

Following this analysis, we developed a new website (CAPP-USA 3.0, <https://capp-usa.org>), which launched in July of 2019. Key was creating a flexible and dynamic architecture which allowed quick updates. Layout, appearance, and navigation were also critical to ensure arrivals would not “bounce off” from boredom or technical obstacles. Links to the encyclicals, the Fondazione website, and explanation of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching were all essential elements.

But rather than being a “voice crying out in the wilderness” (*Isaiah 40:3*), we needed people to be aware of the new website. We needed to target individuals and groups interested in current cultural, political, and economic issues and demonstrate how CST has answers to their pressing concerns. We wanted to target Catholic leaders in business, the professions, academia, the arts and, especially, young people, our future leaders.

To accomplish this, our team developed a social media plan and detailed metrics on several parameters to gauge the reach and efficacy of our efforts.

One approach is focusing on contemporary issues to provide an initial “spark” of interest; to discern the relevance of CST to the concern. Among the issues that we have used (and that have generated the strongest interest in terms of numbers) are:

Climate Change

Covid-19

Examples of the social media posts for these topics include:

### Climate change:

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for CAPP USA. The main post is titled "Is climate change a political issue?" and was posted on August 4 at 12:00 PM. The post text asks, "Is #ClimateChange a political issue? If so, how should we address it?" and includes a link: "Learn what #CatholicSocialTeaching says -> https://bit.ly/2WS3uJp". The post features a video thumbnail with a red and white lighthouse against a blue sky with white clouds. The post has 2 likes, 1 comment, and 1 share. The left sidebar shows "Page Transparency" information, including the confirmed page owner (Yellow Line Productions LLC) and the page manager location (United States). Below that, there are "Related Pages" such as USCCB Respect Life, Diamonds Do Good, and Patristic Nectar Publicati....

### Covid-19:

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for CAPP USA. The main post is titled "The pandemic has exposed...great inequalities and discrimination. And it has exacerbated them!" and was posted 4 days ago. The post text includes a quote: "We must cure [the] larger virus, that of social injustice, inequality of opportunity, marginalization, and the lack of protection for the weakest." and asks, "How? By acting through the lens of the Church's 'preferential option for the #poor': '[I]f there are unhealthy social structures that prevent [people] from dreaming of the future, we must work together...to change them'. #CatholicSocial... See More". The post features a video thumbnail with a quote: "The pandemic is a crisis, and...either we come out of it better, or we come out of it worse." and a photo of Pope Francis. The post has 9 likes and 5 shares. The left sidebar shows "Photos" and "Videos" sections. The "Photos" section includes a quote: "What does true solidarity look like?" and a photo of Pope Francis. The "Videos" section includes a quote: "The crisis especially affects the most vulnerable in our society." and a photo of Pope Francis.

Some posts also reflect themes, often introduced by the question:

“What does Catholic Social Teaching have to say about .....?”

- Common good
- Private property
- Preferential option for the poor

And more....

## Solidarity:

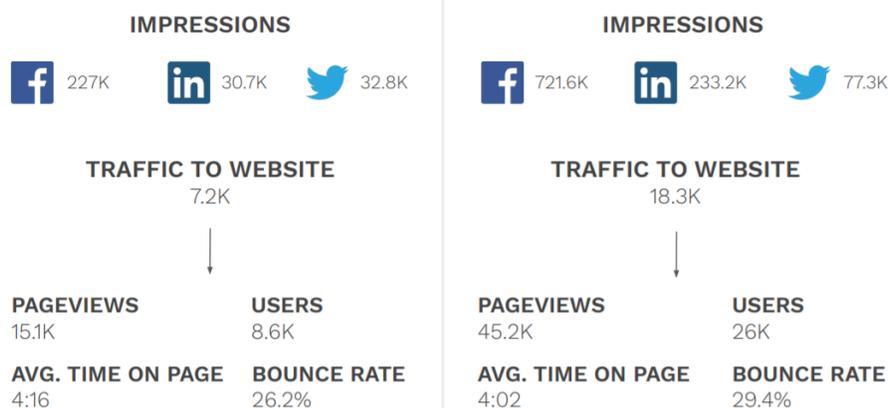
The image is a screenshot of a Facebook page for CAPP USA. The page header shows the profile name 'CAPP USA' with options to 'Send Email', 'Liked', and 'Message'. Below the header is the 'About' section, which includes a map of the organization's location at 295 Madison Avenue, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10017. The 'About' section also contains text describing the organization's mission to evangelize lay Catholic leaders and its relationship with Blessed John Paul the Great. The main content of the post is a question: 'What is real #solidarity? How does it play out in day-to-day life?' with a link to a video. Below the text is a video thumbnail showing two hands shaking. The left hand has the text 'Standing Together' written on it, and the right hand has 'Against HATE' written on it. The video title is 'What does true solidarity look like?'. The post has 5 likes and 1 share. The bottom of the screenshot shows a Windows taskbar with various application icons.

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A comprehensive, detailed presentation of all the metrics and data would be too overwhelming to include in this type of paper, but some highlights are summarized below in the data for the most recent quarter on the left and for the year since inception on the right. Key points are that we are getting more of a younger audience now, reflective of our desire to reach the future leaders of society. Additionally, the time spent on the site by those who visit is quite good at over 4 minutes.



Additional data on the number of impressions from the social media posts, subsequent traffic to the website from these posts, and the bounce rate are cited below, again the most recent quarter on the left and the full year since inception on the right. Of note is the very low bounce rate compared to industry metrics, indicating that visitors tend to stay on the site and explore it.



**IMPRESSION:** Number of times posts were seen.  
**PAGEVIEW:** Total number of pages viewed.  
**BOUNCE RATE:** Percentage of visitors who view only one page (The lower the better).



Perhaps one of the most compelling observations on the results of the social media/website project is that in the one year since it was started; there has been greater interest, followers, and outreach than in over the preceding 10 years combined.

Plans continue to develop to address other issues such as the pertinence of CST to elections, health care, and more.

Videos, including animated infographics, are also planned as it is a format that has proven particularly effective in engaging viewers.

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The full social media experience can be had at:

[LinkedIn](#) (**CAPP-USA**)

[Facebook](#) (**CAPP USA Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation**)

[Twitter](#) (**@cappusa**).

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Below are:

- **A series of screenshots from the webpage on Climate Change**, demonstrating what a person clicking on the social media link would see (The graphics and page layout are much better when viewed online at the website (<https://capp-usa.org/climate-change/> )
- **An infographic on the Covid-19 issue** (also better viewed at <https://capp-usa.org/covid19/>)



## Climate Change



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“Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their **duty towards nature** and the Creator are an **essential part of their faith.**”

Pope St. John Paul II, 15 >

## A ‘Topic’ for Catholic Social Teaching?

### YES!

“In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, **man consumes** the resources of the earth and his own life **in an excessive and disordered way...** In this regard, humanity today must be conscious of its duties and obligations towards future generations.” (Pope St. John Paul II, 37) >

**The earth is a precious gift of the Creator**, who has designed its intrinsic order, thus giving us guidelines to which we must hold ourselves as stewards of his creation...In my recent Encyclical, Caritas in Veritate, I referred more than once to such questions.” (Pope Benedict XVI) >

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### Addressing Climate Change



Who is Responsible?

"[T]he direct duty to work for a just ordering of society...is proper to the lay faithful" (Pope Benedict XVI, 29)  
It is up to the lay faithful to implement Catholic social teaching in the world: Gaudium et Spes (the Pastoral Constitution On The Church in The Modern World) establishes this responsibility.  
"Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment." (Pope Francis, 3, 1)



Is it a Political Issue?

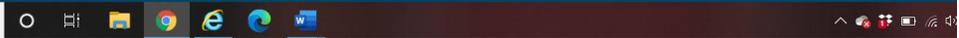
Clearly, in the US, the answer is **yes**.  
One political party committed the country to a significant international accord on the topic (The Paris Agreement) and has proposed a "Green New Deal" which would allocate tremendous resources to it: the other party has withdrawn the US from the international accord and opposes the other party's current proposals.



Fulfilling My Obligation

"[T]he formation of just structures...belongs to the world of politics" (Pope Benedict XVI, 29)  
"Politics is an essential means of building human community and institutions" (Pope Francis)  
"We, Christians, cannot 'play Pilate' and wash our hands... We must participate in politics because politics is one of the highest forms of charity because it seeks the common good. And Christian lay people must work in politics." (Pope Francis)  
Pope Francis recognizes that this "is not easy; politics has become too tainted. But I ask myself: Why has it become tainted? Because Christians have not participated in politics with an evangelical spirit? ...To work for the common good is a Christian duty, and many times the way in which to work towards it is through politics." (Address to the Students of the Jesuit Schools of Italy and Albania, June 7, 2013)

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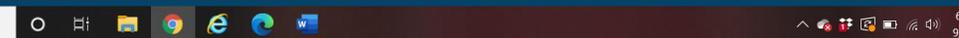


### How Best to Address Politically

"[W]hat does it mean, in practical terms, to promote moral truth in the world of politics...?"

- It means acting in a responsible way on the basis of an **objective and integral knowledge of the facts**;
- deconstructing political ideologies** which end up supplanting truth and human dignity in order to promote pseudo-values under the pretext of peace, development and human rights;
- fostering an **unswerving commitment** to base positive law on the principles of the **natural law**. (Pope Benedict XVI, 12)

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### What is the Current State of Affairs?

"On almost every environment and climate change and global warming issue we have tested, **there are major partisan gaps.**" (Gallup - Frank Newport)

Indeed, **one of the starkest displays of political polarization** in the U.S. is on the subject of climate change with Americans who worry "a great deal" about climate change being: Democrat = 66%; Republican = 18%. (Gallup - Frank Newport)

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### The Need for Discussion

"An **integral ecology** is inseparable from the notion of the **common good**, a central and unifying principle of social ethics." (Pope Francis, 156)

With such a significant number of Americans not viewing human caused climate change as a "long held truth", **their perception must be addressed** in order to form the political consensus required for any immediate and extensive solutions.

For this to occur (as for all critical social issues) discussion is needed! Indeed, **discussing climate change is required** to adequately form consciences (with the tenets of Catholic social teaching) and find/agree solutions.

"To break through the communications barriers of human nature, partisan identity, and media fragmentation, messages need to be tailored to a specific medium and audience...that trigger a new way of thinking about the personal relevance of climate change." (Matthew Nisbet)

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### The Need for Faith & Science

This suggests activities by Catholics should focus on **grassroots efforts to educate people and shape individual behaviors**, and, perhaps, this is an area where science and faith need each other:

"The faith community really can't understand this problem without understanding the science... and the scientific community is going to need the faith community to inspire and motivate and provide a different sort of vision for how we live on this planet together. I think and that dialogue really kind of comes up, it's going to be tough for either community to go this alone. In other words, we can't do this without the science and technology that they are going to bring, and they won't be able to change minds and hearts without us." (Dan Misak, Executive Director of Catholic Climate Covenant)



### In Summary

If the time to address global warming is truly short and human actions can ameliorate it - one can and must **make the political case for such action.**

And, Americans seem to be open and willing to listen.

As Mr. Newport, of Gallup, noted: "**Americans are**, in essence, **open to argument** about the relative benefits of the Paris Agreement. That is, Americans are open to argument about the accord's positive impact of helping the environment and reducing the upward trend in the earth's temperature on the one hand, and its cost in terms of slowing job growth and increasing federal expenditures, as well as its fairness to the U.S. on the other."

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### What About other Environmental Issues?

"The natural environment is **given by God to everyone**, and its use entails a personal responsibility towards the whole of humanity".

Pope Benedict XVI

Everyday air pollutants directly affect our health. Toxic dumps represent major public health hazards. The amount of waste and garbage poisoning landfills and the oceans...There are numerous, pressing environmental issues crying out for solutions: **Air Pollution; Water Pollution; Soil and Land Pollution; Deforestation; Effect on Marine Life; Loss of Biodiversity; Household and Industrial Waste; Radioactive Waste Disposal; Landfills**, etc. The impact of many of these issues is also borne disproportionately by the poor, in developing nations.

In focusing extensively on Climate Change is it worth considering: Are we missing "the forest for the trees"?

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# THE CRISIS & THE CURE

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Are government leaders adequately addressing the necessary balancing between keeping people healthy and significant economic impacts?**






We have witnessed an extraordinary scope and impact of infection and death rates: overcrowded hospitals, dwindling supplies of ventilators and protective equipment, and shortages of staff.



Parts of the country remain on "lock-down" and the economy suffers - millions have lost their jobs and businesses are shuttered.

**Does Catholic social teaching offer insights into these discussions?**  
**In short – yes!**

**The framework is The Common Good.**

The common good is "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily." *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1906)*



**In fact, Catholic social teaching "demands" government take up this responsibility:**

- Attaining the common good is the **sole reason** for the existence of governments.
- The Church insists public authorities must "arbitrate... between various particular interests" to attain the common good. *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1906)*
- It is in the "political community that the most complete realization of the common good is found." *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1910)*



Government issued guidelines, restrictions, etc. should be developed on deliberations considering all consequences – economic, health and civil liberties.



**Clearly, the 'crisis & cure' debate is a valid one**

To ignore this responsibility and opt for any singular focus, without a full deliberation of causes/effects would represent an abrogation of the state's responsibilities.

**The Church offers guidelines those responsible for solutions must consider:**

- **The common good** "is concerned with **the interests of all**" *(Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, 53)*  
"without favoring any individual citizen or category of citizen." *(Pope St. John XXIII, Pastoral Letter, 54)*
- **"Every single citizen has the right** to share in it." *(Pope St. John XXIII, Pastoral Letter, 54)*
- The common good applies to future generations. *(Pope Francis, Laudato Si', 158)*
- Public authorities must ensure the security of society only **through morally acceptable means.** *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1908)*
- "Ultimately" the common good "demands **a correct understanding** of the dignity and the **rights of the person.**" *(Pope St. John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, 47)*
- "There cannot be holistic development and universal common good unless people's **spiritual and moral welfare is taken into account.**" *(Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 76)*



Our political decision makers must understand: The common good is not "simply the sum total of particular interests; rather it involves an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values." *(Pope St. John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, 47)*



Those values are identified by Catholic social teaching, especially the key principles of



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HUMAN DIGNITY



SOLIDARITY



SUBSIDIARITY