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@Pontifex and the #SabbathSelfies

John McCarthy | Aug. 29, 2013 NCR Today

Oxford University Press announced that the word "selfie" has been added to the online dictionary of the English language. In case you were wondering, selfie (plural is, of course, "selfies") is defined as: "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website." I bet at this point, you're asking, "Why does this matter for the church?"

The Holy Father posed for a selfie with a group of young people visiting the Vatican. You can see that photo here [1]. Selfies are the new rage, and everyone is posing for them. Chelsea Clinton took one [2]; Bret Michaels, Donald Trump and Donald Trump's hair, too [3]. P. Diddy and the Mona Lisa do a pose here [4] (that's my personal favorite).

Now last time I wrote about popular culture and the church (What Catholics can Learn from Shark Week [5]), some people thought the idea was silly. However, I'm going to give it another try.

Think about this: It would have been very easy for the Holy Father to turn these young people down. He could have just as easily suggested that they pose for a formal photo taken by a Vatican photographer. Instead, he embraced the silliness of the opportunity and posed for a photo with the visitors (as a result, making their lives complete).

Catholics around the world can take away an important lesson here: Engage the culture.

At World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Pope Francis said, "The results of our pastoral work do not depend on a wealth of resources, but on the creativity of love ... At times we lose people because they don't understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people."

When I read that statement, it really hit me. Why aren't we talking more about the "creativity of love"? Why is it that every day, we fail to ask ourselves, "How can I bring love into the lives of others?" I happen to think it's because there is growing sentiment that the world is scary, unsafe and unworthy of our faith. Our biggest barrier is this prevailing sense that we must "protect the church" from some outside, unnamed impeding force.

We make long theologically correct statements about why we can't do something or who can be called Catholic versus who cannot. This is not to say that certain moments do not call for seriousness, but we need to learn how to take a joke every now and then. People are viewing the church as an exclusive, cold, barred-off entity. How can we let people in if the walls are so high? The "creativity of love" must begin with meeting people where they are, and joining them on life's journey.

So take out your phones and tweet about going to church. Maybe download a Catholic iPhone app, or suggest to your friends that they read a Catholic blog (shameless plug). Moral of the story: Let's take a step back and remember our simplicity -- and pose for a selfie.

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Links:
[1] http://photoblog.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/08/29/20243076-pope-francis-poses-for-a-selfie-at-the-vatican?lite
[2] https://twitter.com/ChelseaClinton/status/345605996615442432/photo/1
[3] http://s3-ec.buzzfed.com/static/enhanced/webdr03/2013/4/12/13/enhanced-buzz-10731-1365787130-7.jpg
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