

TikTok and the Gospel on the Digital Continent

What is TikTok?

TikTok is a video sharing platform originating from China, which has now gone global.

When TikTok first burst onto the scene in the USA, the FBI was very leery of how the Chinese government was gathering and using the data of users. While these concerns have not been assuaged, Gen Z was largely unconcerned and jumped on the comprehensive video platform. Other generations soon followed.

TikTok best supports short videos, and is famous for its trends and challenges. The platform allows for creators to write a brief description to accompany videos, but these descriptions will only be visible to read if viewers click on them. Therefore, videos must largely be able to stand on their own.

TikTok videos are recorded, edited and uploaded through the TikTok app on your phone. This does mean that TikTok needs access to your camera to operate. The TikTok platform has specific settings to enable or disable certain features that allow other creators to take and use the videos or audios you create for their own purposes, or how comment interaction or messaging can work on your account.

The format of TikTok videos has caught on across generations as they are punchy, catchy, and short. They are especially popular for Gen Z and younger, but also with Millennials.

The TikTok video format has changed other platforms' sharing as well. Instagram created its "Reels" video option as a response to TikTok, and YouTube developed their "YouTube Shorts" videos to accommodate the new TikTok video trends.

Religious Presence on TikTok

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-59513177>

Religious persons have gone to TikTok both to share their faith and to foster community. So have many other less safe groups. TikTok is a place where both religiously sound groups and cultish groups create content. It is a place where viewers might comment with amused surprise or scathing bigotry under religious content. It is important for any religious people on TikTok to monitor their comment sections to ensure that spiritual questions are answered appropriately (and very briefly, as the word limit is very short!) as well as ensuring that hateful or dangerous conversations are not taken up beneath their content. This may involve using the blocking and deleting functions for comments and accounts.

Evangelization on the Digital Continent

Because of the content-saturated reality of social media, especially TikTok, there isn't much room for unintentionality. Content that does not feel authentic, relevant, or have a deeper element coming from religious on TikTok will not be cut slack. Coming onto TikTok to be visible, to be seen, is not enough for religious. Viewers will not respect that. They want to see real giving. They want to feel accepted and safe. They want to laugh and be challenged. The digital continent is a place where the people of today gather and bring their hearts. It is a place they are formed, where they give and receive, where they may be inspired or torn down. It is a place people live large portions of their lives. Like any place where the Lord's beloved gather, it needs Jesus Christ. It needs missionaries. And as through all of Christian history, who will be sent where must be discerned.

As Daughters of St Paul, we look to the example and intercession of our father St Paul to help us in our discernment of the Spirit's call to online outreach. The Spirit brought Paul to some very unexpected places to preach Christ. The Spirit also prevented Paul from journeying to places he had set his heart on. Whether or not TikTok is the "country" on the digital continent that you are being sent by the Spirit is something that needs to be carefully and intentionally discerned. Here are some guiding questions for discernment to help you pray over this:

- What need of humanity do we see present on TikTok? Is this a need that the Lord has asked us to meet in the context of social media?
- Do we have the ability to constantly monitor the trends of TikTok to understand the evolving needs and sensibilities of the TikTok community so as to bring Christ there effectively? Do we have Sisters who are attune to the cultural reality of TikTok and can immerse themselves in it without becoming addicted to TikTok? Do we have the ability to monitor the comments of TikTok in grace and charity?
- Do we have the ability to communicate 'authenticity' in a way the TikTok generation can identify and understand? Or are we called to minister elsewhere?
- Are we intentional about content creation? Are we able to continually discern TikTok activity as a community to foster support, accountability, inspiration, and a foundation of prayer for Sisters who would be running it?
- Can we create short, fun and pithy content with a deeper call to it? Are we willing to communicate with utmost brevity in written responses?
- Are we prepared to take preventative measures for security concerns (such as people cloning your account and pretending to be you, using your content for inappropriate purposes, or the TikTok makers having access to info of your account and the phone being used to administer it)?
- Is the Lord calling us to minister to the people of TikTok in a particular way? Has he set them on our hearts? Are they encompassed in the particular mission of our congregation's unique charism?

Some examples of various Catholic ministries present on TikTok:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daughtersofstpaul?lang=en>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@father.simon?lang=en>
<https://www.tiktok.com/@srbethanyfsp?lang=en>
<https://www.tiktok.com/@catholic.jacks?lang=en>