

Social media catechesis?

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Last week it was reported that Facebook is thinking about lowering their minimum age so that kids under the age of 13 can join the social network, with parental supervision. Many people think this is a bad idea, and some have even suggested that [the age requirement should be raised](#).

As someone who works with youth, I know that many kids under the age of 13 are already using Facebook, sometimes even with their parents' permission and help. I may have a different perspective when my own son is 11 years old, but right now I don't necessarily think this is a bad thing.

Social networks are not fads, and they are more than just communication tools. As I've been studying all week in a Doctor of Ministry course on [The Gospel and Global Media Cultures](#), digital technologies have changed our culture and will continue to do so. "Protecting" youth from social networks like Facebook is a misguided endeavor because our children are already being shaped by the broader digital culture emerging and evolving around the globe.

For about five and a half years I have been using Facebook in youth ministry. In fact, I can hardly imagine keeping up with kids spread throughout Chicagoland without Facebook. And recently, our youth ministry has been thinking about and testing some creative new ways to use Facebook in our work with high school students.

It occurs to me, then, that if culture really is being transformed by social media, and if we keep using these tools in our ministry with high school students, it might make sense to help our eighth grade confirmation class learn how to use these tools in the context of our faith community. If contemporary spirituality is shaped and mediated by digital culture, the church ought to walk with youth as they grow into these social media practices just like we do with other spiritual practices.

So, as the final project for this class, I'm considering the creation and implementation of a digital culture component to my confirmation program. One element of this would be introducing our confirmands to some of the Facebook

practices we use with our high school students. In order to do this effectively, I might have to require the youth to create a Facebook account—which shouldn't be a problem because the youth going through confirmation are typically 13 or 14.

I realize that it might take a lot of work—and expend a lot of my hard earned pastoral capital—to convince some parents that this is a good idea. I imagine that other parents might find it very appealing to know that their children's early experiences with Facebook will be modeled and facilitated in a church context with trusted adults and peers.

What do you think about this idea? Does Facebook belong in our confirmation curricula? Might this be a meaningful and transformative way for the church to proactively engage the ever changing world of digital culture?

*Originally posted at [Vest's blog](#)*