

Dear Families,

As the shelter-at-home order continues, your priests would like to address a subject which can potentially daily have very real consequences for many families and individuals. We hope these reminders and considerations can be of help.

During this time of lock-down, you and your children are probably doing many good things online that perhaps previously you would have not needed to do remotely: Streaming the Mass, attending online classes, or even video chatting with friends and family members who live quite close to you. It can be tempting to want to give wide access to the internet to your children for these good purposes, especially when you are all stuck at home. However, as your Priests who are very concerned with your salvation and the salvation of your family, we want to remind you of what you already know: The internet can be a very dangerous place for anybody, but in particular for children if they are left unsupervised.

Many parents who have spent years forming their children in the Faith, and perhaps even have children who are genuinely striving for a life of prayer and virtue, can tend to think that their children would never view anything that is wrong or sinful. It is abundantly clear, however, that the internet can lure the innocent and unsuspecting into places they never would have guessed they would end up finding themselves. There are some temptations to which we should never willingly subject ourselves or those for whom we are responsible.

We all know that the internet is a very powerful tool. Similar to other powerful and potentially dangerous tools like pools, sharp knives or loaded guns, its proper and safe use requires continuous and vigilant responsible oversight. No one would leave a pool door open 24 hours a day when there are little children around. No one would let even responsible children play at will with sharp knives or loaded guns. The internet needs no less vigilant safeguarding.

Unsupervised viewing of something even as useful as YouTube, for example, can result in your children being exposed to foul language, impure jokes, videos promoting highly disordered agendas, and even material that can function as a gateway into pornography. Moreover, even if your child is not exposed to something sinful, we think it important to keep in mind that something as simple as viewing news reports on the state of the current pandemic, can be terrifying for some children.

These dangers have not even begun to address the perils of social media and its tendency to lead to gossip, backbiting, impurity, and even worse. In fact, statistics indicate that if your child is on social media or many gaming sites, it is highly likely that he or she has already encountered predators, who often pose as children in their on-line identities in order to gain a child's trust.

For these reasons, we think the following considerations to be essential as part of your parental duties:

- *computers, cell phones, tablets and any other device that can connect to the internet should not be allowed in children's rooms. Such devices should be placed in areas visible to the entire family.*
- *we cannot recommend strongly enough that when these extremely powerful tools are used, your children should be supervised.*

- *no child needs a cellphone or tablet in his room while alone, especially at night. It has been helpful to many to have their devices charged in the parents' room or some other highly public place at night, where no element of temptation can come into play.*
- *passwords are helpful, but not if your children already know what they are, or can easily guess them.*
- *internet security should consist in both blocking AND accountability software. A couple of the more well-known and widely used ones are listed at the end of this letter.*
- *every parent with children on the internet should watch the below video by Matt Fradd. He also has a number of other excellent videos and podcasts on YouTube. However, in this video he outlines particularly well and clearly the specific dangers your children face and the measures needed to protect the innocent and help those who have been led down the wrong road. Though it does cost a small amount, we assure you it is absolutely worth the investment!*

<https://www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/title/protecting-innocence-parenting-your-kids-and-the-internet>

To be very clear, the need for supervision and protection has nothing to do with the moral quality of one's child. The reality is that the pornography industry in particular spends millions researching how to ensnare especially the young in their web of filth. (The earlier the habit starts, the deeper it is ingrained, and the longer they have a customer.) These are highly trained professionals and very skilled at leading young people into temptations that are often nearly impossible to reject. Human nature being fallen and temptation in this area of life being so strong, often heroic virtue is required even with safeguards in place. Thus the importance of making deliberate counter efforts if one is going to take the legitimate danger seriously.

It is common knowledge among priests and those who work among the youth that using the computer safely and morally is very difficult when left without protection and supervision. As your priests we encourage you to take all the steps you can to assist your children to navigate this powerful and dangerous technology. With your vigilance, you can do great good in the lives of your children by helping them avoid debilitating dangers and developing the virtues necessary for them as they go out into an increasingly digital world.

Please be assured that we are willing to assist you with this in any way we can and would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

United in prayer,

The Priests of OLF

Internet safety resources:

<https://www.netnanny.com/>

<https://www.covenanteyes.com/>