CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERNET USE

The Internet allows for directness, geographical distance, and anonymity, which can be helpful for clergy who prefer to keep their personal life and sex practices private and separate from their congregational community. It also contains a number of pitfalls—most of which can be avoided by forethought.

What do I want?
   What are my personal needs? Is my Internet activity the appropriate way to meet those needs? What do I want to avoid?

How do I communicate my own boundaries in ethical ways?
   What are the ground rules and non-negotiables in my life?
   How do I communicate them?

What do I want to remain private, and why?
   As my online connection happens, what am I willing to reveal and how honest do I wish to be?
   What am I afraid of my parishioners knowing about me?
   Am I keeping secrets (withholding information that someone else should know)?

How likely am I to run into parishioners on the sites I am using?
   As I get to know the people I meet online, how can I be aware of this possibility?

How would I handle the discovery that my online connection is someone with whom I should not ethically have a relationship? It can be helpful to consider beforehand exactly how to respond, because in the moment of discovery, a clear thought process is less likely.

Am I remembering my safety? Internet intimacy can build a sense of trust faster than may be warranted. Consider the possibilities of being stalked or blackmailed.

How does my public/conversational persona compare with my private/online persona? Am I living two different codes of ethics?

Am I monitoring the amount of time and energy my Internet use is consuming?

The Bottom Line: Enjoy, but be honest with yourself.