



DIFFICULTIES WITH INTERNET USE

Contrasted with the mundane life of an everyday relationship, the excitement of a specific, contained online relationship is tempting but contains a lot of pitfalls. Online connections over email, webcam, and instant message more easily conform to fantasy life, and they can become addictive or even delusional. Managing these connections well depends on self-awareness, self-care and awareness of **characteristics of the Internet**, like:

- **Anonymity** – users can create numerous personas and try out all sorts of different interactions without anyone knowing who they actually are. Without meeting in person clergy have no way to really verify whether or not the person at the other end of the on-line conversation is a parishioner or member of the community.
- **Privacy/Public** – usually computers are located in private homes or kiosks where users feel anonymous and private. This can mean users are not in touch with regular modes of accountability. Given the rise of monitoring and blocking software, as well as the electronic trail left by most computer usage, this privacy/anonymity is not as simple and complete as users might feel.
- **Accessibility** – vast amounts of information are available, from research to news to pornography to commerce to gaming, and more. Not all that is accessible is accurate, helpful, and legal, but it is likely all presented as if it was.
- **Communication** – email and instant messaging provide a unique context for communication. It can be instant with the illusion of anonymity, which can give rise to a specific sort of anonymous intimacy. Subtlety is not always possible, and body language doesn't transmit well. The use of web cams may transmit body language, but it still does not always transmit the subtlety of energy and in-person communication.
- **Geography** – the geography of the Internet is not governed by physical distance but by the type and speed of technology. Someone on the other side of the country may seem more accessible than our next-door neighbor or even a partner.