Pope draws half a million Twitter followers

December 4 2012

The official Twitter account of Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Benedict XVI boasted hundreds of thousands of followers on his new Twitter account on Tuesday—just a day after it was unveiled and more than a week before any actual tweets appear.

Pope Benedict XVI boasted hundreds of thousands of followers on his new Twitter account on Tuesday—just a day after it was unveiled and more than a week before any actual tweets appear.

The English-language version of the @pontifex handle had more than

376,000 followers—up from 2,400 at the time of the announcement on Monday.

Counting all the eight languages of the accounts on which papally-approved tweets will appear, the number of followers was more than 500,000.

The numbers still represent only a tiny fraction of the world's 1.1 billion Catholics who follow the pope offline and are far lower than for celebrity singers Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber who each have over 31 million followers.

The pope's first tweet will appear in English on December 12.

"I'm not surprised there has been such a strong response," Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi said, adding that the initiative had given "a signal of the ability of the Pope and his collaborators to respond to expectations.

"Obviously being a person of a certain age and like other people of a certain age he is not a digital native and will therefore use social networks differently from youngsters but he understands their potential," Lombardi said.

The pope will not be firing off tweets about his personal life but the opinions expressed will be his own, meaning the tweets will not be infallible.

The pope is considered infallible on questions of Catholic dogma.

The first messages will be answers to questions posted for him about matters of faith and afterwards will be drawn from his speeches at the weekly general audience as well as reactions to major world events,

according to the Vatican.

Among the thousands of users welcoming Benedict to Twitter with personal messages was Israeli President Shimon Peres, who tweeted: "Our relations with the Vatican are at their best & can form a basis to further peace everywhere."

Others were jokier, with a Bruce III tweeting "Jesus had 12 followers, @Pontifex has over 300K. Won't be surprised if his first hashtag is #Winning."

The Vatican has taken precautions to ensure the account is not hacked into and the tweets will only come from one computer.

The 85-year-old German pope is a published theologian under his name Joseph Ratzinger and has just completed a trilogy about the life of Jesus Christ—drafts of which he wrote by hand before they were typed up by aides.

Famous for speeches laden with dense theological references, some followers have questioned whether he can condense the world of God into 140 characters.

Lombardi said Benedict will not be using the medium to serve up answers to all life's questions, but his words can be used as examples to guide believers.

"Sometimes the answers we look for may not come from him personally, but we can find them in the Church," he said in an interview with Vatican Radio.

The tradition-bound Vatican has embarked on an ambitious digital agenda including the launch last year of the news.va information portal,

as the Catholic Church tries to reach out to a younger global audience.

The Vatican is also launching a smartphone app called "The Pope App" that will allow users to follow papal masses and events in real time, as well as being able to look inside off-bounds parts of the Vatican using webcams.

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: Pope draws half a million Twitter followers (2012, December 4) retrieved 2 May 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2012-12-pope-million-twitter.html