Kirk warned of dangers of social media

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**A CHURCH of Scotland leader has warned that social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are in danger of "dehumanising humanity".**

Rev Donald Campbell, who has been leading a Kirk panel which has raised the issue of new technology, called for the church to carry out an investigation into potential dangers of the widespread use of online networking and misuse of such sites including cyber bullying and grooming.

<p>He told the Kirk's annual gathering in Edinburgh yesterday there were concerns people who become "hooked" on virtual technology would spend less time forming genuine relationships and this could lead to problems such as a "loss of empathy for others".</p> <p>A report is now to be compiled on the implications of online communications to communities as the church seeks to broaden its flock by using new technology. </p> <p>Mr Campbell's comments come a day after a clinical psychologist warned that a generation of children risk forming an addiction to devices such as smartphones, games consoles and televisions in the way drinkers and drug users become dependent on substances. Ten and 11-year-olds spend an average of 6.1 hours a day looking at such devices, research has shown.</p> <p>Mr Campbell said there were some concerns about trying to engage with worshippers online, adding: "One of the issues with the social networking sites is that people are friends with people they hardly know or don't know at all. There is a danger humanity is being dehumanised by this technology.</p> <p>"If you get hooked into virtual technology and you start to reduce your amount of contact with human beings, and in the most extreme cases, you start never going out at all or interact, then that's an issue for that person as a human being, because are those virtual relationships the same as the ones in the real world?</p> <p>"Well, I think quite obviously they're not. What effect does the virtual world have if they don't interact with the real world? There could be psychological impacts on a person, such as a loss of empathy for others."</p> <p>The Kirk has insisted any online push will not replace traditional face to face ministry.</p> <p>In a report by the Kirk's Panel on Review and Reform, Mr Campbell said: "The Church at all levels recognises some of the benefits the digital age brings: The technology that supports the workings of the General Assembly, presbytery and congregational websites, and the use of Facebook and Twitter to communicate across the Church and beyond.</p> <p>"The current trends of an increasingly secular society pose fundamental questions which must be considered if the present decline in membership of the Church of Scotland is to be reversed.</p> <p>"What does this mean for the traditional models of community, for the values by which previous generations have lived and how do we transmit the values of the gospel to this digital generation?</p> <p>"A Church focused on mission will want to grasp the opportunities and challenges this digital society presents. It is not just a matter of getting to grips with the technology involved. It is about understanding the influence it has on the society and culture that is evolving."</p> <p>Rev John Pickles said internet networking including the online gaming community was "more and more a part of the communication of culture".</p> <p>He said he hoped the report would consider such communities positively "rather than the usual negative approach".</p> <p>The Kirk last night agreed to accept a consultation report on gay marriage for the Scottish Government which reaffirms the traditional stance that marriage should be solely between and man and a woman.</p> <p>It said it will adhere to any new legislation.</p>

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