Prayers for Peace, Hope and Justice

We are all aware of the dangers of the online world — some hidden, some in plain sight. Last week I learned how the far right in Germany uses TikTok to recruit young people, almost entirely unchallenged, because no mainstream political voice has taken up that space. Something else I have come to understand more clearly: we now receive our news and our sense of the world through countless different platforms and feeds. What we lose is a common starting point — shared ground from which we can speak to one another. Without it, we each reason from a different set of facts: facts chosen for us by an algorithm rather than reported to us as news.

And there is a growing body of research showing that young people in particular struggle to build meaningful relationships, to hold conflict without breaking, to weather the storms of their own emotions. We know about sleep lost to our phones, and the anxiety that takes its place. We know about cyberbullying and online gender-based violence. We know about algorithms that reward hatred, violence and destruction. We know that as social media use among young girls has risen so have the rates of distress and suicide. And none of this yet accounts for artificial intelligence, which is only beginning to reshape all of it.

Dear Lord,
We live in an online age, where the online world often takes over how we meet one another in the real one. We are often unaware of what it is doing to us. Lord, open our eyes and open our minds to understand what the online world does to us.

Stand by those who suffer violence online — those who are attacked, shamed and hunted in spaces that should have been safe. Be close to the young who often carry that weight in silence. Give us the courage to speak out when we see injustice and discrimination online even if we fear getting attacked ourselves. Please bring comfort to families and friends who have lost someone due to online violence.

Help us to discern when we are being fed falsehood, and when the world we see online is only showing us back to ourselves. Help us not to rush to like, to comment, to condemn. Make us mindful of the hours we spend online, and of the people beside us we do not see while we are there.

We pray for those who design these systems, and for those who profit from the divisions these create. Give courage to those inside these large tech companies who know what is wrong and are afraid to act against it. We pray for those already building something better and who are trying to make the most of the positive sides of the online world. We pray for parents, schools, teachers and the many people who are making spaces where we put our phones down and find each other again. Bless that work and let it grow.

Let us, the adults, be the example our children need — children who will grow up with the internet and social media as a constant companion.

Give us guidance and give us strength, that we may make good choices, one day at a time. Amen.