

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Restoring Internet Freedom)	WC Docket No. 17-108

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (“USCCB”) submits the following comments in the above-captioned Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, released May 23, 2017.

Communications is at the heart of the Church’s mission. USCCB urges the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) to remain committed to the concept that the Internet continue as it has developed, that is, as an open Internet, because communication is at the heart of the Church’s mission. His Holiness, Pope Francis has stated that “the digital world is a public square The Internet can help us to be better citizens.” (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 50th World Communications Day, *Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter*, January 24, 2016).

USCCB is concerned that the FCC is contemplating eliminating current regulations limiting the manner by which the companies controlling the infrastructure connect people to the Internet. Without the current strong open Internet regulations, including prohibitions on paid prioritization, the public has no effective recourse against Internet Service Providers’ interference with accessibility to content, there will be uncertainty about how and whether those companies can block, speed up or slow down access to Internet content, and nonprofit religious entities will be relegated to an Internet slow lane. Since public interest, noncommercial (including religious) programming is a low priority for broadcasters and cable companies, the Internet is one of the few mediums available to churches and religious groups to communicate their messages and the values fundamental to the fabric of our communities.

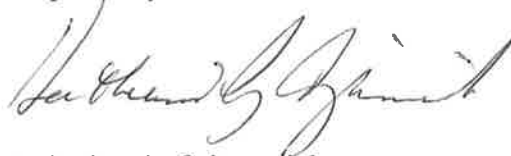
Without protections to prohibit Internet providers from tampering with content delivery on the Internet, the fundamental attributes of the Internet, in which users have unfettered access to content and capacity to provide content to others, are jeopardized. Those protections have particular importance for individuals and organizations committed to religious principles which must rely on the Internet to convey information on matters of faith and on the services they provide to the public. The Internet is an indispensable medium for Catholics – and others with principled values – to convey views on matters of public concern and religious teachings.¹ The

¹ His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, warned against the “distortion that occur[s] when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good As a public service, social communication requires a spirit of cooperation and co-responsibility with vigorous accountability of the use of public resources and the performance of roles of public trust ..., including recourse to regulatory standards and other measures or structures designed to affect this goal.” (Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 40th

Internet was constructed as a unique medium without the editorial control functions of broadcast television, radio or cable television. The Internet is open to any speaker, commercial or noncommercial, whether or not the speech is connected financially to the company providing Internet access or whether it is popular or prophetic². These characteristics make the Internet critical to noncommercial religious speakers. Just as importantly, the Internet is increasingly the preferred method for the disenfranchised and vulnerable – the poor that the Church professes a fundamental preference toward – to access services, including educational and vocational opportunities to improve their lives and their children’s lives.

USCCB urges the FCC to retain open Internet regulations, supported by the strongest legal authority available.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Katherine G. Grincewich', written in a cursive style.

Katherine G. Grincewich
Assistant General Counsel

World Communications Day, The Media: A Network for Communication, Communion and Cooperation, Jan. 24, 2006). His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI has stated, “Believers who bear witness to their most profound convictions greatly help prevent the web from becoming an instrument which ... allows those who are powerful to monopolize the opinions of others.” (Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 45th World Communications Day, *Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age*, January 24, 2011).

² By supporting the goal of continuing the Internet as it has developed, that is, an “open” Internet, USCCB also supports the rights of parents to protect their children from pornography. The means of protecting children from such material is available to parents without ceding it to companies providing Internet access.

