



Technology and cybercommunity

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About Candour

Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

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The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:
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There is **refundable \$50 booking fee** for Glen Innis. This fee is payable to Margaret Black and refunded on arrival at Glen Innis.

Internet resources

Towards the end of last year, the editorial committee held a teleconference to plan the *Candour* themes for this year. I'm grateful for the advice of the committee, who are for 2009: the Rev Howard Carter, the Rev Mary Jane Konings, the Rev Allister Lane, the Very Rev Garry Marquand, the Rev Nathan Parry, the Right Rev Dr Graham Redding and the Rev Dr Kevin Ward.

One of the things we discussed was how to make it easier to share useful online resources. Perhaps we should have a regular column, by a different person every month, outlining what they find most useful; or perhaps we should just encourage people to send in snippets or urls pointing to good resources. If either of these approaches appeals to you and you have something to contribute, I would love to hear from you.

Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Ministers' Information Forms

Ministers' Information Forms are an essential tool for ministry settlement boards looking to make a call. They are also an effective way for ministers to record their achievements throughout their career – including any additional training they undertake.

Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on juliette@presbyterian.org.nz for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

Connecting our virtual selves

Amanda Wells

For the first part of my working life, I was a business/technology journalist, both in Wellington and in London. It was during the exponential growth of internet access and e-commerce, followed by the dot-com boom and bust. I understood enough about the technology and the business mergers and acquisition (or could bluff convincingly enough) to conduct sensible interviews. But now most technology is greek to me. Things change so fast, and unless you retain an avid fascination for the field, it's difficult to keep up with the latest and brightest.

What's the point of having a camera on a mobile phone, I say to myself. Why would I want an iPhone? Then I remind myself how most telecommunications industry people thought text messaging a pointless application that would never take off. It's very hard to predict which technologies will become must-haves and which has-beens. While Facebook is ubiquitous at the moment, it's hard to see its novelty value morphing into enduring use. Similarly half the people who sign up to Twitter drop out within the first month.

But one point made by several contributors in this issue is crucial: if there is a technology that people assume you will have, and you don't have it, then your ability to participate in modern life is hampered. Nearly every Gen Xer I know organises their social life by email. Without it, you'd be out of the loop. Likewise it's a given that everyone has a mobile and can be reached easily with changes of plan or time. And the role that texting now plays in the development and maintenance of romantic relationships would have been hard to predict even just 10 years ago.

Doing any ministry to Gen X without these expected tools would be very difficult. Not only because you are limiting your ability to connect and communicate but also because you are making a tacit judgement. You're emphasising that you're not part of the group; and that you don't value the means by which they maintain their social connections. You need these bridges to help construct and maintain authentic relationships.

However, technology is never a substitute for substance. I can't get my PC or Microsoft Word to write the remaining words of this editorial (unless you're after cod Latin filler). It's still the message that's most important. I tend to see technology as an adjunct to other more complex forms of communication, like actually speaking face-to-

face with people. Pages and pages of email can carry less meaning than a 30-minute conversation, with its intricacies of body language, tone and expression. Whether you can develop meaningful relationships with strangers online whose face you never see or whose voice you never hear is up for debate. Are they as much constructs of your imagination as they are authentic, autonomous individuals? How do you know?

But the internet can create communities of interest for people who might otherwise feel isolated in their geographical context. For instance, I sporadically feel enraged about the use of "reticent" when people mean "reluctant"¹. A quick Google search tells me that others share or even surpass my rage (and I could use this thing-in-common to communicate with them if I so wished). Obviously there are many less frivolous examples, like people finding support from others with similarly rare medical conditions.

The internet can also attempt to pull you into communities of interest from which you may have previously escaped. Facebook requests from old schoolmates you barely recognise can be disconcerting, as can joining sites like Trade Me's Old Friends or similar. If everyone from your past is enjoying amazing career success while being happily married with two gorgeous, genius children, something's not quite right. The internet allows us to take the presentation of polished version of self to new heights.

A society in which all our communication is mediated through some form of technology is a depressing concept. It places a huge emphasis on you the individual; you are out of any context, apart from the context of that instant of communication. When you're instant-messaging or texting or updating your Facebook profile, you are the person constructed by those words. Where you right now, where your attention is focused, the dark circles under your eyes – all are invisible. If you think that many of the problems in our society stem from the breakdown of real, supportive communities, this disassociation should concern you.

The next issue of Candour will have the theme "Being youthful" and a deadline of 29 May.

¹ Technically reticence applies only to speech – it is a subset of reluctance, not a synonym of it.

Making contact with new technology

Lynne Baab*

Communication has always mattered to Christians. Obeying the central commands of the New Testament – make disciples, preach the Gospel, love one another – depends on effective communication.

Christians have always been at the forefront of adopting new forms of communication. In the ancient Greek and Roman world, classical rhetoric was the cutting-edge communication strategy, used by politicians and public leaders. Augustine was one of the first Christians to apply principles of rhetoric to preaching, and during the medieval period many Christians studied rhetoric and wrote about its relevance for preaching. When the printing press was invented, Christians were among the earliest users; first for Bibles and then for pamphlets, printed tracts, magazines and books. In the 20th century, radio, television and film were quickly adopted by Christians and used creatively. The *Jesus* film, for example, has been translated into more than a thousand languages, more than any other film in history, and many mission experts view it as one of the greatest mission success stories.

In the last years of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century, new communication technologies have been appearing with dizzying rapidity. These new technologies – such as DVDs, email, instant messaging, websites, blogs, social networking, cell phones, and digital cameras – are creating opportunities and challenges for Christians and for congregations that no one could have foreseen a decade or two ago.

Some of the new communication technologies have similarities to older forms in that they present information and tell stories. Many congregations use the Nooma and Alpha videos and DVDs, which are very similar to TV and film but in a more convenient and portable format. Many congregations have websites, which enable people to view information about a congregation whenever they want to. Some ministers have blogs, which allow them to communicate what they're thinking about, reading and learning.

In the early days of the internet, email was perceived as largely parallel to letters and printed memos, with the advantage of being faster. In those early days, back in the 1990s, the internet was understood as a tool for imparting and exchanging information. Since then, the internet

has developed as a repository of information in amazing ways, and now we can access facts online that we never dreamed of even 10 years ago. Conveying information and stories has always been significant for effective communication, and they continue to be important. But new considerations have arisen as well.

A place

The word “place” conveys a key concept when considering the implications of new forms of communication for Christians and for congregations, particularly online communication. The internet has moved beyond being just an information tool. It is now a place where many people spend hours of each day; a place of information and stories, like the older forms of communication, but also a place of connection, networking, and exchange of visual information as well.

Instant messaging began the shift, and further changes have come with the proliferation of blogs and social networking websites, which allow feedback and participation from viewers in ways that are foreign to TV and film, the major communication innovations of the mid-20th century. Blogs enable the writer to impart snippets of information, but also provide a place for dialogue from readers. Some congregational websites provide places for people to post photos or comments. Social networking websites, like Facebook and Twitter, provide a place for connections in many different ways, allowing participants to talk about what they're doing, show photos of their lives, and post links to the articles and videos that they think are interesting. Skype and other forms of VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocols) facilitate talk and collaboration without travelling to the other person's location.

Many, many people spend hours of their day online exchanging information and connecting with people. In the same way that a stroll down the hall at work to hand over a piece of paper to a co-worker often results in a chat about the upcoming rugby match, online interactions often include a personal connection as well as an exchange of information. If we believe that Christians bring God's love into every place they go, and if we believe that Christians are called to go to the places where people hang out and live, then we have to take seriously this “place” where people spend so much time.

“Real” relationships

Yes, but are online relationships “real”? Aren’t we encouraging a kind of plastic, faceless, technocratic form of communication? Aren’t face-to-face relationships better?

The more I talk with people who spend a lot of time online, and the more time I spend online myself, the more I understand that face-to-face relationships and online relationships are seamlessly connected for most internet users. Let’s consider a 28-year-old I will call Simon. Simon has a Facebook profile as well as a blog where he writes about politics and movies. His Facebook profile has a link to his blog.

Simon has been on Facebook for a few years, and over that time he has accumulated 228 “friends” on Facebook, both men and women. Some of them are people he knew in high school and college and with whom he remained in touch, so it was natural to find them on Facebook and connect with each other there. Others are friends from childhood and high school with whom he had totally lost touch, but they reconnected through Facebook.

A couple dozen of his Facebook friends are work colleagues, friends from his neighborhood, and people he knows from his church.

Some of Simon’s Facebook friends are people he has never met in person but who are friends of his friends, and they got connected online because they had common interests in films and politics. He got connected with several of his other Facebook friends through blogging. Some of them write blogs he likes to read, and others have read Simon’s blog and found him on Facebook.

Every day or two Simon updates his Facebook profile with his latest thoughts and activities. He also posts links to interesting online articles he’s read and YouTube videos he liked. All of his friends receive a notice about his updates, and he receives notice of his friends’ updates to their profiles. If a friend is doing something interesting, Simon fires off a message to that friend using Facebook’s e-mail or instant messaging capacity, which might result in a brief online exchange over the course of the day. It might also result in a social event that evening or during the next weekend.

Simon is in several groups on Facebook, including a group from his church. Sometimes he finds out about something interesting going on at church because of the Facebook group.

Simon loves blogging, and he reads dozens of blogs each week. He writes comments on some of them, sometimes giving a link to his own blog, and sometimes those other bloggers read his blog posts and make comments. He experiences a sense of significant connection with some of those bloggers—including a few who have become Facebook friends—because he dialogues with them fairly intensely about politics and movies.

Simon’s relationships flow seamlessly between the online and face-to-face environments. He attends a film discussion group at church, and many people in the group are his friends on Facebook and they continue the discussion of films through their Facebook posts. Sometimes

the discussion of a film begins on Facebook or on a blog post and results in an outing to see that film. Many of his Facebook friends and church friends read his blog, and they post their opinions and thoughts there.

He lives several hundred kilometers from the town where he grew up, and when he plans a trip home, he uses his Facebook page and his blog to let his friends know he is coming so that he can see them in person.

Simon’s parents are quite concerned about all these online relationships. They wonder if all the people Simon meets online are actually honest about who they are. They worry that Simon will be tricked or manipulated by people faking their identity. Simon tosses off his parents’ concerns. What does it matter, he asks, if he has a dialogue through Facebook or his blog with someone who is covering up his or her real identity? If the conversation is interesting, that’s good enough.

And he would never arrange to meet a stranger anywhere private. The few times he has arranged to meet up with someone he met online, he always chooses a coffee shop as the location for that first meeting, and he chooses other public places for the second and third meetings as well. How is that any different than meeting a stranger at a cafe and arranging to meet up a second time, he wonders. Unscrupulous people can be anywhere, including the neigh-

Face-to-face relationships and online relationships are seamlessly connected for most internet users

bourhood or the workplace. We can have an interesting conversation with a shady person online or face-to-face. The same kinds of safeguards need to be in place.

Simon's pattern of relationships, flowing back and forth between online and face-to-face connections, is typical among the young people I have talked with, both men and women. "Simon" is a composite of several people I interviewed. However, Simon's amazing number of social connections is not at all unusual among the people in their teens, 20s and 30s I talked with. His social contacts might be facilitated online, through texting or in person, but no one can doubt that he is well-connected and involved both intellectually and socially with his friends.¹ This pattern of relationships is increasingly typical of my own life and many others who are a long way from being "young people."

"Real" connections

I've spent a lot of time describing Simon's pattern of relationships because of the many fears I hear in congregational settings about online communication being less valuable or less "real" than face-to-face communication. When the telephone was invented, similar fears were expressed. "Real" communication, it was felt, would be lost because facial expressions and body language are not visible over the telephone. Phones now seem innocuous. We see them as essential tools that help us stay connected with people we care about.

I've been on Facebook for only six months, and I get a huge kick out of it. I love being connected to old friends and new friends, I love to see their photos and what they're up to, and I love reading the articles and watching the videos that they consider interesting enough to post. I've joined a lot of Facebook groups, some of which are connected to ministry organisations I value. I get frequent messages on Facebook from those ministry organisations, telling me what they're up to.

If the internet is increasingly experienced as a place, how can congregations and Christian individuals serve God in that place? That big, overarching question will include a lot of smaller, practical questions: how much money and time can we afford to spend on a website? Is a blog a good way to communicate with some members of the congregation? Should we have a Facebook group

or page? What about the other social networking websites like Twitter, Bebo, and LinkedIn? And how can we navigate the growing reality that communication is becoming individualised?

An Anglican minister told me that she communicates with her lay leaders largely through email, but a few leaders aren't online, so she still needs to ring them on the telephone. But two of her youngest lay leaders no longer check their email very often, because most of their online connection happens through Facebook. Will she have to join Facebook in order to communicate with them? And will she need to send cellphone text messages to yet others?

The answer to her questions may be "yes," indicating one of the challenges of these shifts in communication patterns. A second challenge comes from the increasing emphasis on visual communication.

The rise of the visual

Numerous scholars and observers have documented the rise in visual communication that has steadily changed the face of communication in recent decades. Films and television have enabled us see things as well as read or hear about them. Digital cameras and cameras in cell phones have changed the way we circulate photos. The wider culture is increasingly visually rich, which raises expectations for congregations in the way they use visuals.

This impacts many ways congregations communicate who they are and what they value. Prospective visitors want (and expect) to see what the congregation is like. Therefore, photos on websites and in brochures are increasingly significant as a means of giving visitors a glimpse of the congregation.

A consideration of visual components in congregational life is also essential in our time. *Leadership Journal* reported on a survey that showed that ministers are increasingly using props as a part of worship services and sermons to illustrate the points they want to make.² Costumes, visual art, banners, and other kinds of visual decoration are increasingly significant in this visually oriented culture.

How can we navigate the growing reality that communication is becoming individualised?

The same *Leadership* survey reported on the increased use of projection screens in churches of all sizes across the theological spectrum. In an increasingly visual culture, projection screens need to be used for more than words. Many preachers use visual images as well as words as they preach.

Many ministers in the Baby Boom generation and older believe that they are engaging with visual culture by using PowerPoint slides with bullet points to prepare their sermons. Edward Tufte, a researcher who studies the visual presentation of various kinds of data, argues that bullet point lists are a very poor way to present information because they are overly simplistic and thus they blur complex and nuanced relationships between ideas.³ Many Christians in Generation X and Generation Y would not consider bullet point lists to be visual. They understand the much greater richness of photos, art, and other kinds of visual images in communicating and illustrating stories, in part because their time online has shown them the impact of visual images.

Many writers who discuss ministry in the 21st century emphasise the significance of story-telling. Stories can be told visually as well as verbally. One congregational website I looked at provided a place for members to post photos, and when I looked at the site, more than 11,000 photos had been posted. Those photos gave me a sense of the congregation's life and the life of the people in it. Those photos told stories in powerful ways.

Impersonal? Faceless?

As I talk to people in congregations about communication, I hear lots of concerns about online communication being impersonal and detached. Yet as I exchange emails with friends, as I read blogs and look at Facebook, I engage with personal stories and I see stories through photos. I interact with ideas that people are writing about or thinking about. I would never advocate wholesale replacement of face-to-face communication with online connections, and it's clear that a person can spend too much time online. However, in this busy and fragmented society, with friends strewn around the world, I love being able to get a glimpse of my friends' lives online. Those friends might be here in Dunedin or they might be thousands of miles away, but they are a rich part of my life.

An old friend and his family live in Kathmandu, where they do literacy work. I love looking at photos of their life there which they have loaded onto a photo-sharing website. Another old friend posts links to fascinating video clips about racial justice on her Facebook site. I love watching them. A new friend here in Dunedin posts links

to interesting articles, and I love reading them. Sometimes we discuss them online and sometimes we discuss them in person. Visual and verbal stories, snippets of everyday life. These are the kinds of stories that used to be shared only in person in the cafeteria at work, at the neighborhood shop or while watching the kids play sport. Now those stories are shared online as well.

Darrell Guder is Princeton Seminary Dean and advocate for a missional view of church ministry. In discussing the significance of the local congregation as the centre of mission, he writes:

The "one another" passages, almost one hundred New Testament imperatives emphasising the mutuality of Christian community, only make sense within a community whose members are committed to Christ and to one another. Such relationships require frequency of contact and communication, common worship and Christian activity, and mutual responsibility and support.⁴

In our time, some of that frequent contact, communication, mutual responsibility and support happens in online settings. The challenges for Christian leaders today include learning to use the online environment wisely to communicate information, as well as helping congregation members grow in wisdom and integrity in using the internet to facilitate relationships and nurture community.

Information AND connections

I believe every church should have a website that presents information – using words, photos, and links – describing what the congregation values and who it is. Some congregations don't have the money or volunteers to update a website regularly, and in that case they should ask someone to create a simple and attractive website with basic information, with a phone number and email address where changing information can be accessed, such as worship times and additional activities. If at all possible, congregations should consider budgeting some money for the creation and regular upkeep of a website. If the internet is a place where many people spent a lot of time, then a presence in that place is desirable, so potential visitors can access the information they need in order to feel comfortable visiting the church and so members can get resources to nurture their faith.

I believe every minister should consider having a blog. In addition, the leader of any ministry in a congregation that relies on volunteers should consider having a blog. Blogs are free, and blogging websites such as Blogger (www.blogger.com) provide templates for setting up

a blog. Posts on blogs can and should be informal and short, around 250 words at the most. Blog posts can include such things as preliminary thoughts about the Scripture to be used in worship the next weekend, a brief description of a helpful Christian book, reflection on a current event, news about an upcoming conference, some thoughts about a recent movie or bestselling book and links to websites that have helpful resources for Christians. With busy schedules, blogs provide a place for dialogue that can take place at odd times, not just before or after a church event when people are physically present. (An excellent book that describes the opportunities that blogging presents for ministers and leaders is *The Blogging Church* by Brian Bailey and Terry Storch.)

I believe congregational leaders need to carefully consider the opportunities presented by social networking websites such as Facebook, particularly if some members of the congregation use one of the social networking websites.

If the internet is indeed a place where people gather to exchange information, discuss things that matter to them, tell stories and post photos that illustrate the stories of their lives, then congregations and their leaders need to be there discussing things that matter and telling stories about God's presence in daily life. They need to be there with words and visuals. They need to nurture connections between people that flow seamlessly between online and face-to-face places and that reflect God's love.

References

1 Simon's story is adapted from *Reaching Out in a Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul* by Lynne M. Baab (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2008), 116-118.

2 Eric Reed, "Preaching by Faith and by Sight," *Leadership Journal*, Summer 2007, 25-27.

3 Edward R. Tufte, *The Cognitive Style of Power-Point* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press: 2003), 4.

4 Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 148.

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Heart and Soul, which discusses congregational communication in this digital age. You can visit her website for information about her books and to read articles she has written: www.lynnabaab.com.

Questions for reflection

For people who don't spend a lot of time online: Are you open to hearing from others the way they perceive that their friendships and relationships are nurtured online? Are you willing to listen openly and with respect to friends and family members as they talk about the ways they believe their life is enriched because of the internet?

For people who spend a lot of time online: Are you open to hearing from God or from friends that you need to spend more time nurturing face-to-face relationships? Do you submit your internet use to God's scrutiny, as you might submit any activity you participate in? Do you pray that you would manifest Christian character and the fruit of the Spirit online as well as in face-to-face relationships?

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Keeping up with essential technology

Colin Marshall, St John's, Mt Roskill

Only at the beginning of his ministry did Jesus use the dramatic to catch people's attention. And even then, he moved quickly to teach biblical truth. Jesus knew that people could become infatuated with the impressive, the flashy, the spectacular. He frequently concluded his teaching with personal encounters or by explaining what he had done and said to His disciples. Contrary to popular opinion, while technology can create a "wow factor," it does not and cannot have the same impact as Jesus and the disciples nor of good Biblical teaching; alone it is a poor substitute.

We shouldn't accord technology too much importance nor expect of it what it can never deliver. Technology is a tool, a useful medium of transmission, but it has no soul, no power or intrinsic worth of its own and should never steal the show any more than Jesus would allow healing to become the focal point of what he was doing. Technology can enhance, but never replace, the role of the man or woman of faith doing God's work.

So what can technology do for ministry? Consider this... "I rang the other day and you weren't there. I wish you had a mobile phone but you don't. I guess you don't want people contacting you. I left a message... but three days later you still hadn't answered it. I guess you don't really care. I'd email but I don't know your address and can't find out what it is ... if you have one. And then last week you preached on communicating the Gospel. I guess it must have been sponsored by Tui's right?"

I hear this type of thing from people regularly. They wanted to get hold of the minister but couldn't. Like it or not we live in an age of instant, global communication. Corporate organisations store their databases on computers on the other side of the world and run reports from these on demand. Data flies back and forth across the Atlantic on fibre-optic cables that transmit data that incredible distance almost instantaneously. Universities around the globe are linked in global networks running real-time video. People of all ages now use various forms of instant messenger, Skype and Facebook. Email and texting are so much a part of life that a teenager without a cell phone

and computer is considered odd. One of the fastest growing industries, even in these hard times, is that servicing retired people's computer needs. More and more families, grandparents especially, stay in touch around the world via the internet using online video and tools such as Skype. Not long ago, sitting in a small hut in Tanzania on a mission trip with Hebron Christian College, we put daily video files online over the internet so that parents in NZ could see how their children were doing. Where do

we as a church, and people in ministry, sit in this fast-changing world when it comes to technology?

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are first and foremost communicators. We

have the privilege of being commissioned to serve God and share his Good News with the world. It is incumbent upon us that we communicate well and in a timely manner. It means being contactable. It means being where the people are at. Much of our pastoral work actually grows out of this. Jesus used all the tools at his disposal to communicate well. He sat in a boat off-shore, and on mountain tops, so the natural wind current would carry his voice to the crowd. He went to dinner parties where people were to share his message. Jesus, for all the limited technology of his world, made the most of what local knowledge was available to communicate. Though interestingly, we have no record of him ever writing (except maybe in the sand).

Having been in the technology field for most of my adult life, I've developed a reluctance to jumping just because something is new or innovative. Having the best and latest normally means testing someone else's new product ... with all its bugs and undocumented features. It also means paying through the nose for something that will be half the price in six months or so. Instead, I take the attitude that no technology is necessary until most people expect you to have it. (Sorry guys, I know that's what your wives have been telling you!) A current example is the cell phone. People today, generally, expect to be able to contact their ministers quickly and easily, especially if there is a family crisis, and they expect a timely response. The cell phone is the easiest and anticipated

way to do this. Costs shouldn't be a big issue. Phones, especially pre-pay ones, are relatively cheap. You don't pay to answer calls, and texting is relatively inexpensive. And if you are away on holiday or having a needed break, there is always the off button or even redirection. The cell phone is now an expected necessity; thinking otherwise, I'd suggest, puts you out-of-touch with most people and certainly most young people.

When we come to the use of technology in the church, it is primarily a case of considering the audience and need. Installing a computer and PowerPoint display software for a good screen display during services, when more than three-quarters of your congregation can't see past the next pew, is probably a waste of time. But, if doing so has a high likelihood of encouraging the other third to bring their friends, and if the youth group can use it for movies and the like, then there may be a good case for doing so.

Some facilities, such as using the computer for the emailing of notices, rosters, bulletins, and general communications with the church, and use of the web (internet), are now well and truly standard. In education, government, business and most people's social lives, the computer is a basic tool. And that's the point. It is now a basic tool. Not an end in its own but a tool as essential and normal as the telephone. The use of the computer is a facet of life that every minister needs to master if they are to do their job well. Could you do your job well without ever answering or using a phone? You could do it, yes... but well? I doubt it. The computer is the modern day equivalent of the phone.

Similarly websites and blogs (online discussions) have an impact that goes well beyond our immediate parish. I was stunned recently when we have had our website down for an overhaul, with just basic things available over Christmas (including a visual Christmas story-book) but no sermons. We have received complaints from overseas because my weekly sermons were not posted – from India and Australia(!) of all places. Now that really did surprise me! Apparently some people read, share and use these sermons weekly.

At a slightly more advanced level is the possibility databases present. We use a database that I wrote and have been modifying for years. A number of other churches use this as well. Databases make it easy to store basic demographic details the people in your congregation and then produce statistics, phonebooks, group lists, birthday reminders and the like. All of these address some of our basic functional and operational needs. Once set up and

maintained properly, this tool makes life easier, allowing more time for the people contact time we need.

I would hope that in time our national church has its act together enough that every parish has a computer and that our internal communications are electronic - saving no end of paperwork and making communications far more efficient and timely. Much good progress has been made in this area already in the last few years. If you haven't checked out the website you should – it is a wealth of resources (www.presbyterian.org.nz).

One of the key problems in people's minds is the technological expertise required to be effective in these things. In fact, there isn't as much knowledge required as you might think. Technology has become easier and easier to use; a far cry from what I grew up with. A basic PC with internet access, Microsoft Word, Excel, anti-virus, anti-spyware and basic tools is easy to set up and relatively intuitive to learn. And if you struggle, find a teenager!

Some of you may be thinking: nothing will replace face-to-face communication. I'd agree whole-heartedly. But electronic communication can open doors you might not imagine. I am regularly stunned by things and issues that people email me or chat online about; things that they would be hesitant to raise face to face; sometimes quite personal, or embarrassing things. For many guys technology has even been come a trap, a new source of sin. When things are raised online I generally reply with some appropriate comment and arrange to talk or meet with the person involved. Once an area is broached, and my initial response gauged, people seem keen to get together. It's often a relief. Then there is the opportunity for ministry, prayer and bringing people into a closer relationship with the Lord. An opportunity that might not have happened otherwise... and after all, isn't this what it's all about

P.S. We are currently negotiating with Microsoft NZ and will shortly be able to advise you how you will be able to get your Microsoft software via St John's at special, much reduced, charity rates. We have been working with Microsoft on this on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand for months and now have agreement – we are now working through the pragmatics of distribution! Details to follow soon.

Multimedia as a servant to preaching

Douglas Bradley, Glendowie Presbyterian, Auckland

When a colleague raves over the latest ministry transforming technology how do you respond? Do your eyes glaze over or are you reaching for your iPhone to show off your latest “app”? How about your congregation? Do they think you are closer to the preacher in the cartoon on the right or the sisters in the following story?

My sister and I are in our 80s and certainly not experts in technology. However, she bought a cell phone and was determined to learn how to send text messages. We went to a local phone shop, where she asked the assistant to show her how to text. “I’d be glad to,” the girl said, “but I’m afraid you’ve brought in a TV remote control.”

Both of these extremes (total avoidance and uncritical embracing) are like ditches on each side of the road. If our aim is to be the best communicators that we can, then we do well to avoid either ditch.

This article is aimed at helping those who want to get started as well as those who can benefit from tips to improve their current technology use. It will focus on using multimedia in worship services delivered via a data projector and Microsoft Office’s PowerPoint software.¹

Taking stock of resources

Some congregations are blessed with members who are technologically proficient and enthusiastic about multimedia. You may have been called to a church where such a team is up and running or you may find that such people are ready to be involved. If you are so blessed, then encourage and learn from them. Remember that those with technical skills often won’t have the big picture in mind and need clear guidance from the minister when it comes

¹ The Open Office suite is free and has PowerPoint equivalent software. A number of technologically confident churches are using purpose-made software such as Easy Worship.

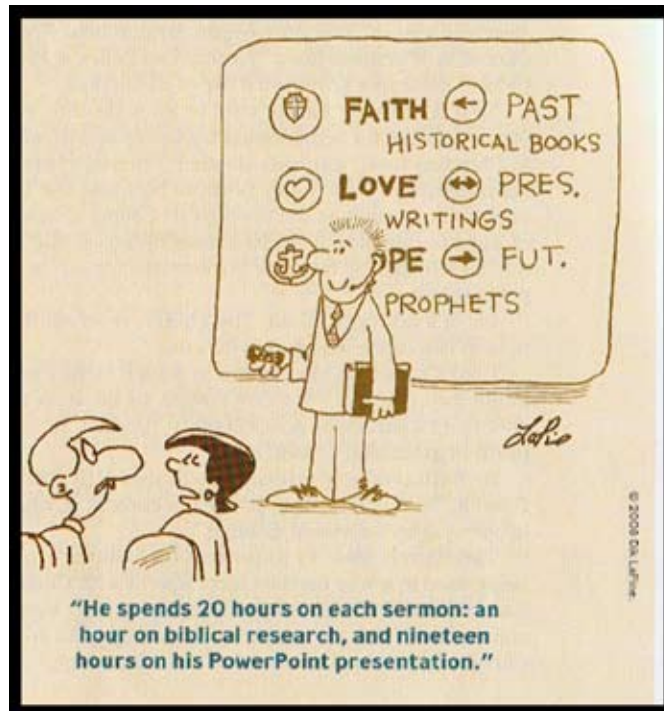
to enhancing and not distracting from the worship experience.

It is helpful to take stock of your own computer skills.

Most ministers can use a word processor to generate letters, reports and sermon scripts. Sending and receiving emails, with attachments is another common skill. If you can word process and insert an image/photo into a document then you can use PowerPoint. Using a community education provider to improve your computer skills is a low cost, helpful option.

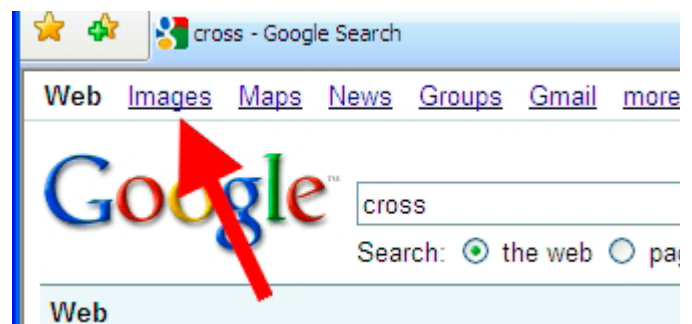
Thinking through the budget implications of developing a multimedia ministry is helpful. There are the up-front capital costs of hardware (data projector and computer) and software (Microsoft

Office or the free Open Office suite). Also allow for the purchasing of resources (video clips, subscription to website providers etc) and personnel training.



Hunting down images

The internet has a plethora of images that can enhance a sermon and other elements of the worship service. The easiest way to access images is to use the search engine Google. Enter your keyword (eg “cross”) into Google and click “search”. By default, the search results will list websites but by clicking the “Images” tab at the top of the page (see accompanying diagram) the images found by Google will be displayed.



The key to using these images is to look at the image size that is represented by a number followed by a “k” (for kilobyte). Images with a small “k” (less than one hundred) are generally too grainy or pixilated for multimedia use. You will have no resolution problems with images with a “k” greater than two hundred.

There are also websites that specialise in providing images related to Christian themes. Of the free sites Heartlight (www.heartlight.org) is a good place to start. Of the websites that require a subscription, PowerPoint Sermons (www.powerpointsermons.com) provides professional-quality material that allows you to carry a visual theme through your sermon or the whole worship service (eg song lyrics, responsive readings, communion, notices etc). Preaching Today (www.preachingtoday.com) provides a number of useful services, including images that are linked to specific sermon illustrations.

Video magic

PowerPoint allows compatible video clips to be inserted seamlessly into your presentation. They can be used to enhance the worship experience (for example, reflective Christian music clips during the distribution of elements), to promote church programmes (DVD supplied by Alpha), to provide contrast (street interviewer asking about the afterlife) or to illustrate a sermon (a character giving up his life for his friends in the children’s movie Ice Age).

Unlike images, which can be acquired for free or at a cost, video clips on the internet tend to cost. Worship House Media (www.worshiphousemedia.com) has an excellent range of specifically produced Christian video clips, while Wing Clips (www.wingclips.com) provide a selection of video clips from Hollywood and Christian movies. Wing Clips’ free subscription is worth checking out, though watch for compatibility issues with this free service. Text Week (www.textweek.com) has identified Christian themes in an extensive range of Hollywood movies to help get you thinking about how to use secular clips in sermons.

Pulling it together for the sermon

Some preachers restrict their sermon multimedia to headings and bullet points. Though this may be useful, it does have a lecture type feel and underutilises the power of multimedia to communicate with both the heart and

mind. A recent guest preacher’s PowerPoint contained a dozen images with one or two interspersed Scripture verses. His skillful preaching was enhanced as the images drew the congregation further into his message. I have an expository style of preaching and tend to have a half a dozen key scriptures, on different slides, as the core of my sermon PowerPoint. I will then have two or three images that tie in with illustrations or scriptures and all this is tied together with a strong visual theme provided from PowerPoint Sermon material. About once a month I will use a video clip as stimulus material (interview with an atheist from the documentary movie Expelled) or as an illustration (video clip from Pirates of the Caribbean dealing with atonement for sin).

Cautions, encouragement and a blessing

A well worn cliché pertinent to multimedia is “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Just one image projected during communion or in support of a sermon illustration can move the heart and mind in ways that words struggle to match. However, with this experience comes the temptation to go overboard. We can

overwhelm our congregation with too many images or with screeds of text. Animations and video clips have their place but we do well to remember that with multimedia “less can be best”.

A second caution is to be careful not to let multimedia dominate over relationship. In the early days of my ministry, my wife reminded me more than once not to “hide behind technology”. Sermon preparation and delivery is a result of wrestling with Scripture and prayer during the week so we can deliver God’s Word to the congregation. When we preach out of our relationship with God, we build relationship with our congregation. This, and seeing God move in people’s lives, is more of a priority than showing off our technological proficiency.

So do you want to be the best communicator that you can? Do you want your congregation to engage in worship in a deeper way? Do you want both the heart and the mind to be touched by God’s Word? Be encouraged. Even small steps with multimedia will aid communication and enhance the worship experience. May God bless you as you seek to integrate a measure of technology into your ministry.

Facing up to Twitter

John Roxborough, minister emeritus, Dunedin

Facebook and Twitter are among the more recent web phenomena to have been taken up by politicians and the media. Easily seen as gimmicks, and not for the serious-minded, they may deserve some of the derision that has also come their way, yet these and other forms of social networking have proved significant in sharing breaking news, and in providing an unexpected database for research that anyone can access.

Texting on the cell phone has become a familiar pastoral tool for many, but do these forms of texting on the web have the same promise? Beyond the transient excitements of early

adopters looking for another fix, is there something here of real value? Web services mean information is public, which should cap some pastoral exchanges, but it also means that open conversations about spiritual matters can find a wide audience.

The line between tool and temptation is fine. Tweets – messages of up to 140 characters shared on the internet – abound; from the bored in presbytery meetings and the distracted in theology lectures. Not a lot of us need something else to play with when we should be facing responsibilities. There is a caution in a book title that Amazon emailed me today: “Just Do Something: How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc”. It may be about other forms of religious procrastination, but the new generation of web-based programmes certainly do provide endless possibilities for the avoidance of obvious duty. But are they also up there with creative possibilities for worship, mission and community? I think so.

This is one area where the idea of placing mission first can help. There have been a number of tweets with the reminder that Christology should come before both ecclesiology and missiology. However much I agree with that, the practical task of deciding the “to do” list of the day requires a sense of what it is we are trying to do and who we are doing it with.

The “who” of our ministry requires attention to where people meet and how they communicate. If our people are on Facebook and or Twitter, then that is one place we can meet them. It is wrong to assume that everyone is using it – but it is also an issue if we fail to connect with those who are. Confidential conversations may be OK by mobile phone texting, but really require telephone or Skype, if face to face is not possible.

Where will the next generation of elders come from and how do they communicate with each other?

In the area of “what”, of course youth leaders and younger ministers “just do it”. It has been interesting to see the buzz after the church camp with people tagging each other in photos and

sharing just how cool the whole experience was. Others of us may need some encouragement to see the potential for self-expression, communication, getting it out there, and extending the conversation.

For public information, Facebook and Twitter and longer forms of blogging are in effect forms of public theology – putting our life out there for people in general to interact with, not just our target or church-based audience. At some point we may want to follow the PCUSA and put church news headlines out on twitter – or teasers for what is coming up in *Spanz!*

Education and training rapidly accommodate new tools. The content of our training may depend primarily on our identity as a Christian Church in the Reformed tradition, and its formulation will owe something to the felt needs of people in leadership, but its delivery must also take account of where our present and potential leaders are and what they are used to. Where will the next generation of elders come from and how do they communicate with each other?

We are in another phase of internet development in which applications in the internet “cloud” create possibilities for new forms of activity and interaction, without the need to buy any software at all beyond whatever computer or mobile phone we use to access the worldwide web.

The implications for reference information are huge. Encyclopaedias are practically obsolete even if they should not be – the accessibility of Wikipedia and the development of the self-authoring wikis in specialist disciplines over-rides whatever cautions universities make about not referencing Wikipedia in assignments. In my view, whether you reference it, or not you would be foolish not to see what the Wikipedia article says on any research topic. The scope is also there to add to what is available for others to read. Book reviews on Amazon might be a more useful outlet for Christian reflection than letters to the editor of a newspaper.

Facebook has enabled me to locate two members of my family, one of whom no one had had contact with for years. It has renewed links with old friends. It tells me what some younger family members are up to – more perhaps than they realise – and it has also generated some annoyances in the form of virtual gifts I could mostly manage without.

Twitter has enabled me to track what people think about presbytery and Synod meetings (see below), to see how much the word “missional” is part of people’s religious vocabulary (there is even a missional “Twibe”), and to track the interest building towards Calvin’s 500th birthday.

Accommodating changing technology is part of life. Perhaps Calvin’s theology warns us about expecting more than we should from the material things, and the dangers of self-absorption and idolatry, but he was also one who fully used the technology of his day to create and support an astonishing network of Reformers.

A few sample tweets on the key word “presbytery”:

“I’m glad we came! Good times and good food :)...”

“Presbytery worship was good. Not 747-style good, but still good.”

“Good sleep. Good quiet time with Lord. Good coffee. Good presbytery meeting. Now home for a good night with my fam.”

“Presbytery Meeting Today! I’m so excited, I just can’t hide it! I love dreaming with other leaders!”

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PointPoint and the art of preaching

Howard Carter, *studentsoul*, Auckland

PowerPoint has become a pervasive part of our society. It has closed the curtains of conference rooms all around the business world. It is used in pre-schools to display photos of what the kids have done. We went looking at intermediate schools last year: each class room had a PowerPoint running and one of the selling points for the schools was their IT suite, where students were learning to put PowerPoints together. Around Auckland University, there are flat screens flashing from one slide to another. They are used to deliver messages at halls of residence. Walking into some situations without a PowerPoint presentation is like turning up without your shoes or pants.

In 2001, Microsoft suggested that at least 30 million PowerPoint presentations were made every hour. Just possibly PowerPoint has changed the way people communicate with each other; we present rather than converse. A mother dealing with her daughter's messy room and an executive thinking about how to talk with her husband about why she didn't think they could afford an overseas holiday this year are examples of users I have read about recently. The New Yorker suggested PowerPoint had become so pervasive that it was even being used in that most conservative of institutions... the church!!!¹

In response, Terry Taylor, who runs a website for preachers and Christian education, was asked about the growth of the use of PowerPoint and visuals in church and sermons, and he commented, "Jesus was a story teller, and he gave graphic images. He would say, 'consider the lilies of the field, how they grow', and all indications are that there were lilies in the field when he was talking."²

I have to confess that I am a fan of PowerPoint as a tool for communication and, in particular, for preaching. I have enjoyed the way it enables me to use visuals, both still images and video clips, in my sermons, both as illustrations and as a way of engaging people using two different senses. It can also allow people to see the structure of a sermon more clearly. As MIT Professor Steven Pinker

says, "ideas are multi-dimensional and, when properly employed, PowerPoint makes the logical structure of an argument more transparent."³

PowerPoint is not everyone's cup of tea. I was preaching at a combined Lenten reflection and two retired Presbyterian ministers sat in front of my son. He was distressed to hear them comment to each other that they did not like my preaching style. They saw PowerPoint as gimmicky. I avoid using all the bells and whistles of PowerPoint and try to make the technology itself as invisible and seamless as possible - but let us face it, we have all seen or been guilty of being so caught up in cool text animations and slide transitions and having words fly across the scene etc. Maybe it can distract people, becoming merely an amusing gimmick.

Like any other powerful tool or medium PowerPoint needs some critical thinking on how it can be used effectively

I'm what Leonard Sweet calls an "immigrant" into the digital culture⁴ but my children are natives, so it is important to effectively master the technology of this new culture. My hope and prayer is that it will always

help people to connect with the passage I am preaching on in a positive way. Like any other powerful tool or medium PowerPoint needs some critical thinking on how it can be used effectively.

Using graphics and images seem a great way to help people understand and comprehend an issue or an idea. But we need to learn how to do that effectively. Edward Tufte, MIT's guru of the visual display of data, argues graphics need to be used properly to impart information. He uses two different case studies. He analysed the Space shuttle disaster in January 1986. His assessment was that it was avoidable. Engineers had warned the management at NASA that the cold temperature that morning was the lowest that they had ever had for a launch and could impact on the very rubber O ring that failed. They used thirty nine different diagrams and illustrations but could not successfully convey their concerns to the management team. Tufte suggests that they ignored some basic rules for data display, and so failed to make their point. Sec-

ondly, he gives Snow's plague map as an example of how changing the way data is displayed can have a huge impact. Before Snow, mapping of Cholera cases was done in terms of time. By mapping cases in terms of location, in the 1854 cholera outbreak in London, Snow was able to trace the outbreak to a certain pump in London into which sewerage had leaked. The handle was removed from the pump and the epidemic went away.⁵

There was the old story about a preacher who had "argument weak shout here" written as a prompt in the margin of his notes. Perhaps in today's world, amidst the low background hum of data projectors and laptop computers, it could be argued (he said without raising his voice) that it could equally read "argument weak use a killer image". "With the visual distraction of a dancing pie chart a speaker can quickly move past the laughable flaw in his argument."⁶

PowerPoint was designed to take presentations out of the hands of the professional designers and put them into the hands of the ordinary person but that has its drawbacks. Around the world, top-flight executives can spend hours putting together presentations, cutting, pasting, searching for images and fitting everything into seven lines per slide and seven words per line instead of doing the important things that they need to do. Could the same thing be said about pastors' studies? I apply strict rules on searches for images and putting PowerPoints together, because you can waste hours.

We need to be aware that PowerPoint and data projectors and screens can change the way people relate to you as a preacher. The art history lecture is the spoken genre that has been affected by electronic projection for the longest. The slide projector revolutionised this form of communication. Analysts talk of how students have developed a growing familiarity with the paintings they see on slides but are losing their connection with the lecturers who stand, often in shadows, looking at the images they are talking about, instead of the students they are teaching.⁷ Although technology and architecture can conspire against you, I appreciate a bit of wisdom from Jim Wallace at Bethlehem Community Church. He says that he stands in front of a screen as much as possible so people have to look past him to see it. I never look at the screen behind me to see images; instead I try and keep contact with the congregation (I have to trust my PowerPoint technician to keep up with me). Researchers also found that people bemoaned the way in which art history lecturers had lost the ability to paint pictures with words.⁸ Sometimes it is also important to turn the technology off and speak from the heart.⁹

I find that modern digital projection technology fuels my imagination far beyond simply being a tool for preaching. I think we have only just scratched the surface. I have used webcams to do interviews in services with people it would cost a fortune to invite to speak. I wonder about hooking up live feeds to the missionaries and aid workers your church supports. With a simple video camera, you can invite older members of the congregation who are in residential care to still be involved in services. They could do the Bible readings for you. I have gone out and done surveys in the street for Easter and Christmas services. Young people have put together their own videos for use in services. I have seen people interviewed on the subject being preached on in the service and a TXT message system used to get feedback and questions. I have recorded sermons in one church on DVD to be used at a smaller satellite congregation in a spread-out rural parish. It takes the pressure off vacant parishes or multi-preaching-station parishes. Let's face it, large urban churches with multi campuses are using this technology to franchise themselves. Alpha has been so effective in many places because it uses DVD technology.

There is another benefit. There is nothing like reviewing a DVD of your sermon or an audio file on the internet as a tool for assessing your own preaching.

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Some basic technology tips

Reg Weeks, minister emeritus, Central Otago

When the editor asked if I had any thoughts to share on the topic, my response was that I would enjoy the challenge of doing a sort of “how to” for the techno lo-brows (like me). There are many who are more computer literate than I am, but Diane and I have developed some useful ideas (we think) on how to use data projection in worship in a way that enhances without being too electronically intrusive or gimmicky.

So what do I know about such things? Well, I’ve always been a bit of a gadget nut. I started with a cell phone, laptop (Windows 3.5, which I still have) and Apple Newton (also still operational) when I went to St Ronan’s in 1993. So I’ve seen a few changes over the years.

Now I use an Asus Laptop with 15in screen, DVD writer etc. Also have a data projector, and a cell phone that runs Microsoft Mobile (with Google Maps), as well as an iPod and a nifty little vacuum base speaker about the size of a golf ball!

Diane uses T-stick broadband with a later model Vista laptop. I’ve been looking longingly at Nintendo’s Wii with fitness and sport programs, not to mention the latest iPhone. They’re just amazing!

Over the last seven years here at St Andrew’s, Wanaka, we have used PowerPoint as the basic program because it’s simple and effective, and often comes bundled with your computer. There are quite hi-tech worship programs that may do a smoother job, particularly when you want to use video clips or DVDs but they’re generally more expensive and more complicated – great if you have a techno-whiz in the congregation. But almost anyone can learn to use PowerPoint, particularly if they are familiar with Word. (My son used PowerPoint to develop diagrammatic swot notes when studying for his BA in psychology.)

So where have we got to?

When preparing her sermon Diane likes to search the web, particularly Google Images, for evocative pictures that fit her theme, and pastes in relevant Bible verses on which she wants the congregation to focus. She also chooses from CNN or similar an image as a background for the “Prayer for all Creation” (intercession). It takes its place as one of a series of “mood” slides, mostly of local scenes

that we have photographed or that have been contributed over time by members of the congregation. These carry words indicating what is going on at each stage of the service, including the nature of the prayer, and projected during each transition or while a prayer is being offered. From about 15 minutes before the service until after the benediction, there is always some image on the “screen” (in our case an expanse of white wall near the sanctuary). Until the service starts, I cycle the notices as a series of “ad” slides (just like at the movies).

The slides that Diane has put together are transferred to me via a flash drive along with the printed order of worship for the service. The office secretary has already typed up or copied from her collection the songs/hymns in Word and emailed them to me.

My task is then to put together the whole service, starting with the basic slides that make up the actual order, along with any of the notices and adding in the words that will be sung, as well as Diane’s sermon slides. In all, anything up to 60 slides.

We now have a file of well over 300 songs and hymns all typed up in PowerPoint and ready to copy and paste. We also have over 130 title, transition, prayer, response, and notice slides from which to select or modify.

It’s up to me to monitor the aesthetics, watch font size and readability, and choose background photos that go with the general theme. New songs are made up easily by cut and paste from the secretary’s Word document and the whole process takes me about two hours, not including projection time. We started with the slide designs that come with the program but have now modified them to suit our preferred style.

Some of our preachers use a more formal lecturing style of PowerPoint presentation with bullet points but our primary approach is based on accelerated learning techniques, where what is projected fills out, adds colour, or opens other perspectives on what is being said or sung. The font for songs is mostly Tahoma 40 or 36 bold, with the smallest of contrasting shadow to maintain legibility over colours in the background photo. Animated text is used sparingly and always to fit with the purpose of the slide itself.

We use PowerPoint to project the words of reflective music or songs, and this technique forms the basis of our Taize service, which is candlelit and meditative – listening and reflecting rather than singing. We are also experimenting with a DVD handycam and will trial filming Diane’s sermon for presentation at another service.

Then, of course, there are sound desks, mikes, fold backs, as well as call-minder, cell phones, txtng, and Facebook, Youtube, Google, twittering even - and what about Nooma? Maybe they are for another time and another contributor. But it’s all about learning the language, culture and technology of each new generation – and having fun while you’re at it.

How can we approach mission online?

Roy Pearson, St Andrew’s & St Philip’s, North Shore

What a huge topic! Pages and pages of material are available online and the debate rages. Whole books have been written on the subject. Can the virtual world replace the real one? Is an online community a real community? Can we worship online? But this one fact we cannot ignore: that our young people use technology to communicate like never before. If we are to reach them, we must communicate in their language, using their technology. This is crosscultural mission like we have never seen before; our youth text, Bebo, Facebook, Second Life, blog, Youtube, and Twitter, and all this from their cell phone, which takes movies, still photos, plays music, downloads the latest news, weather and traffic information from the net, as well as tells them where to go, when to be there and the quickest route.

Before training for the ministry, a group of my peers (and remember this is now 10 years ago) got together to set up an online church. We were at the time some of the leading thinkers in this area. To my shame, we did not do anything but talk and dream; and now we look at the whole realm of what has been done, far and beyond our wildest imaginations.

I personally am in the process of setting up a daily devotional via cell phones: each day people signed up will receive a text of encouragement from God’s Word.

But the real issue is this, should we as a church community be using these technologies? What about the communion of the saints? I wish to use some examples from my online experiences.

I came across a person in a Christian chat room, St Pixels (where there are daily services one can attend if you so choose), who is living in a commune in the wilderness of Tasmania. Her husband forbids her outside contact with people. So she worships and chats online. Every now and then she will go quiet and after a period of time, she

comes back usually with the words, “husband came in, turned screen off.”

The second is in the UK and the wife is very sick, needing 24-hour care. The husband, retired, stays at home to look after her; his only escape is to spend some time in community online.

A missionary in the Pacific, looking for English-speaking services, finds them online. Many years ago, we moved from communities of location (the local church) to communities of choice: I choose to worship here. This has been reflected in the removal of parish boundaries.

An extension of this is the technology that allows us to communicate with anyone around the world instantly. On World Communion Sunday, I led the call to worship for a church in Quincy, Illinois. It was 3am Monday morning and I sat in my study and used my computer, web cam, microphone and speakers to lead the call to worship; I was followed by people from all over the globe. We had someone from every continent (except Antarctica, the satellite feed failed just as the service began.) The church in Quincy saw us all on the big screen, and I had my photo in the front page of the Quincy paper.

Nowadays the technology is limitless and what we can do with it is huge. One Auckland church videos its service and delivers the DVD to its outlying branches, so that the same message is preached at all its five churches each week. Our use of technology is limited only by our imagination. This of course begs the question, should we be doing so? To this I can only answer YES! We must!

If we are to take the Gospel imperative to go to all peoples everywhere seriously, then we must be where the people are, and they are online. If we are in the business of communicating a message then we must use all available communication methods to do so.

Now hear this, this use of technology will build the Kingdom of God, and not necessarily build the local church. From my examples above, not one of those people were in New Zealand. The real issue, I believe, that hinders our use of this technology is that we are focused too much on our own patch, and not enough on the Kingdom. Who pays for me to set up my daily devotional via cell phones, which will reach (I hope) 3000-5000 people each day, when the vast majority of those are not in my parish, or even my presbytery. Who pays for the many hours I have spent online in life changing conversations with people in the States, the UK, the Pacific? My Parish?

This, I think, is the issue; the mindset needs to change from the local parish setting to a global setting, which of course has huge implications. Do we need to employ internet missionaries? To be perfectly honest, this is something that I have thought seriously about. We need people online, who can bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the many, many seekers using technology from the safety

of their homes to ask questions they would be too afraid to ask in real life.

Our church website is read by more people from overseas than from New Zealand (we track this every month, so we know). I suspect this is the same for your church website; does your website content reflect this? People from overseas don't want to know about the service times (unless it's an online service) or the physical address, or what last week's notices were. They want your teaching; can they listen to the sermons, download them? Get teaching materials? Help?

Now I have covered a lot of ground, and raised some very interesting issues. I don't have the space to answer them, and I'm not sure I have all the answers anyway. But I do believe that the next great mission field is an online one, and we do need to seriously wrestle with the questions, and the dramatic change of focus from parishes to Kingdom building.

Film review

Watchmen – Directed by Zack Snyder – Released March 2009

By Martin Baker

Okay, so you're not going to spend the \$11.50 to go and watch the \$100 million, two hours and 40 minutes of this cinema version of the 12-issue DC comic book of the same name. But lots of people have.

Perhaps you do not share my interest in the way that pop culture communicates themes of ethics and theology, but seldom do we see a movie where an entity is actually viewed by a good number of the populace as God.

The plot of *Watchmen* focuses on a group of superheroes who come out of retirement in order to solve a particularly unpleasant conspiracy involving the end of the world. This is a parallel world of the 1980s, where Richard Nixon is still president and nuclear holocaust seems imminent. (Needless to say this is contemporary comic writing, more in the style of the latest Batman movie, the Dark Knight, and reflecting far more flawed and ambiguous super heroes – a trend evident in the genre from the 1960s onward)

The story culminates in the discovery that genius Adrian Veidt (formerly the superhero Ozymandias) has executed

a plan whereby the Soviets and Americans form a new union based on their response to a common enemy that has wiped out millions from both sides. Unbeknown to them, Veidt has engineered this destruction on the premise that the sacrifice is justified because of the peace and stability it generates for the future.

No, this is not the movie to take the junior youth group to watch. But you can be pretty sure that most young teenagers have seen far more violence, sex and heard worse language on the internet, in the school playground, on MTV or on DVDs in their own homes than is presented in the *Watchmen*. You may well disagree, but I have often wondered whether the critical issue is not so much what our children see and hear in the media that influences them, but the context in which they do the seeing and hearing. What is normative in the life of our young people? Are they part of a community in which they feel loved and supported? From whom or what do they receive teaching about morality and ethics, faith and theology?

Discussing the movie later with my 16-year-old son, I was reminded again about how media savvy and discerning our teenagers have become. We talked about moral choices, about the nature of God, and whether Dr Manhattan fitted the bill or not. Ozymandias may have, arguably, provided an example of where the ends do not justify the means, but in the discussion with my son after the movie, sometimes the opposite is also true. The discussion was worth the \$11.50 worth of very spectacular pulp.

In the bottom of an old desk in a minister's study that I was using for a few weeks, I came across a letter written some 60 years earlier. It was clearly a letter in a series of exchanges between two ministers discussing whose voice had the richest timbre and was most resonant. The letter identified several of our own Church's patriarchs (all of whom now surround us in the great crowd of witnesses), comparing whose voice was superior.

It provided me an unusual vignette into the professional lives and concerns of those whose names we sometimes still speak of with a sense of veneration. The letter reminded me of how our thinking has changed. Describing a minister as a "great orator" is not an attribute that we often assign to an individual. Perhaps because there are few, or perhaps because such a quality is now not valued in the same way.

While churchgoing does not feature in my childhood memory, from the occasional service I sat through as a young teenager I have a much stronger memory of how the preacher spoke, rather than what he said (and it was almost always a "he" back in the 70s). Hands frequently grasped in dramatic gesture, eyes upcast, pleading with heaven (for what? Insight, wisdom, mercy, understanding?). Then great pauses, followed by moments of seeming anger or amazement. Whatever he said, the congregation were left in no doubt that it was said with extraordinary conviction, passion and a certainty of the truths being expounded. At eight feet up, the pulpit was a kind of stage, with the drama of the liturgy being played by the main character, the minister.

Now I fiddle around in my pocket in the hope of hitting the right switch for my lapel mic. And pray that the data projector is going to work this time. So what has changed? For a person without a rich timbre and lacking in resonance, one of the most challenging courses I ever took was run over a university semester by Peter Gomes (judged, as they seem to do in the United States, by Time magazine, as one of America's seven "star" preachers). Peter ticks all the boxes in the "great orator" tradition. But what I found interesting and somewhat reassuring, was his insistence on authenticity. "Finding your own voice," as he would say. Not allowing the technology to mediate the relationship between you and your congregation. Incidentally, I remember him always reminding us that if the Scripture reading includes some difficult text, always deal with the difficulty. Name the elephant in the

room. Otherwise each member of your congregation is going to depart the service thinking everyone else understands something that he or she doesn't.

"The medium is the message" is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan in his 1964 book "Understanding Media: The extensions of Man". McLuhan argued that while we may focus on content, it is the medium in which that content is communicated that has a particular influence on the ways that society develops its attitudes, beliefs and values. One of his most interesting arguments is that the more intense the media, the less is required by the viewer or listener to consciously participate or extract value. For example, an intensive musical and visual retelling of the Easter story may have the effect of treating the congrega-

tion as an audience, preventing any opportunity for a sense of participation in the Gospel story. On the other hand, a service very low in content and intensity may present community

worship as an event little different from sitting at home listening to pleasant music.

For us, I think the question about technology is firstly to do with its absence rather than its presence. Who are we and what do we have to say and do when there is no technology to support us? Or most frequently, when the technology breaks down? The sound system has blown up and the data projector has just melted into the carpet – what then? Are we still going to worship God or are we going to sit there irritated by the failings of human systems and integrated circuitry?

We don't have to be Luddites to affirm the value of authenticity and to celebrate our commitment to building communities based on the very special qualities and experiences of Christians through 2000 years of church history. As I read the literature about shifts and changes in ecclesiology, it seems perhaps that we are moving into a new era now. From the power of a preacher's oratory, through the wonders of multi visual projection, to seeing the emergence of a Church that has a flexibility and dynamism far more able to engage with a world changing at a speed unimagined by those who led us just a generation or two ago.

