CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

MAY/JUN 2001

The Connected Community

How technology is shaping our lives and congregations

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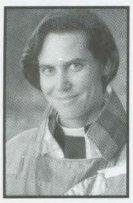

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A Better View of Congregations

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE REVISED CONGREGATIONS MAGAZINE (Jan/Feb 2001). I want to thank you for taking what used to seem like a promotional piece and changing it into something of more direct value. I particularly enjoyed "Nurturing Oneself," "The Mystery of Congregations," and "An Island Amidst the Storm" (I shared copies of this one with my diaconate). What I liked about "Mystery" was hearing someone speak positively about the continued role of congregations in postmodern life. I know the bad news (pastors feel it in their bones); thanks for the good news.

I couldn't help but recall a very emotional event in my own life while reading "Mystery." In the early 1990s I became pastor of Emory Baptist Church in Atlanta, a dying downtown church that had only 25 parking spaces (a major drawback) and a handful of faithful folks. After trying any number of ways to grow the church—including mass mailings, door-to-door visits, newspaper ads, and remodeling—we came to the painful conclusion that the church needed to close, and we joined with the First Baptist Church of Decatur. We gave our building to Mercer University, which used the proceeds to endow their new school of theology in 1996.

The story that relates to this happened during the emotional time of moving toward our last service. A neighbor heard that we were giving away our property and thought that Emory University—which wanted the property because it was adjacent to the campus—might get it. He asked me to sign a petition concerning parking zoning (a constant fight between Emory and the neighborhood). I told him that it was a difficult time for me because I was the pastor of the church that was closing. He still asked me to sign the petition. I asked him to come to our last service and explained that I thought the neighborhood was losing a vital part of itself. I also said I wished the neighborhood had supported the community church. His response: "I didn't go to the Burger King when it closed. Why should I go to your church's last service?"

Having my church compared to Burger King was one of the most painful things that has ever happened to me. That's the view out there, so thanks for sharing a better one.

Nelson Granade
First Baptist Church
North Wilkesboro, North Carolina

Editor's Note: Many thanks to all of you who told us how much you like our new design—the most common word we heard was "wow!" Please keep writing to let us know how we can serve you better.

The Cluetrain Manifesto

95 THESES WE DARE NOT IGNORE

Bonnie A. Perry

In March 1999, four Webheads nailed 95 theses to the front door of the Internet cathedral and *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (www.cluetrain.com) was born. The document, authored by Christopher Locke, Rick Levine, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger, is a wake-up call to corporations that urges them to reshape their practices, reevaluate their mindsets, and make use of the attitudes and direct, informal ways of relating that have developed on the Internet as means to connect, converse, transact business, and create communities.

Creating Compelling Community

Although I applaud the authors' use of the Internet as a means to connect, what most fascinates me about *The Cluetrain Manifesto* is its ability to name some key ingredients needed to create a compelling community. True, we all would benefit from better Web pages and more efficient use of e-mail and list-serves. But the manifesto goes further. In a succinct set of operating principles, it reveals how technology can be used to create a dynamic community of substance and action. These are principles that we in the church dare not ignore. After all, look what happened the last time someone nailed 95 theses to a door!

The opening paragraphs of the manifesto proclaim,

> People of earth, a powerful global conversation has begun. Through the Internet, people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting smarter . . . These markets are conversations. Their members communicate in language that is natural, open, honest, direct, funny and often shocking . . . Most corporations, on the other hand, only know how to talk in the soothing, humorless monotone of the mission statement. . . No wonder networked markets have no respect for companies unable or unwilling to speak as they do.

The Shoe Fits

The authors of the manifesto may be directing these words to corporate conglomerates, but the shoe fits our institutional church. Our congregations and national church bodies often speak in that same humorless monotone. Reading the last part of thesis 14—"To their intended online audience, companies sound hollow, flat, literally inhuman"—I change it in my head: "To *potential parishioners, churches* sound hollow, flat, literally inhuman."

How, you might ask, do newcomers experience the institutional church as speaking hollowly? As an example, the Episcopal Church has hundreds of signs around the country directing passers-by to nearby congregations. Each sign declares, "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You." Yet upon entering the sanctuary of these welcoming congregations the visitor frequently is expected to know the established practices and words of the liturgies, which of several books to use, and on what page to begin. Unless visitors know their way around the *Book of Common Prayer* and when to stand, sit, or kneel, they are more likely to feel embarrassed and awkward than included and welcome. Most congregations do provide worship bulletins answering those questions, but it is almost impossible to manage two or three books and a bulletin besides.

A Genuine Point of View

Imagine what our churches would be like if we took *The Cluetrain Manifesto* to heart. What if our institutional verbiage no longer sounded flat? What if our worship, our relationships, our committees, our newspapers, our newsletters, and our annual reports vibrated with genuine humanity? What if we truly listened to newcomers and learned about community through a sharing of their experiences? What if our congregations ventured into honest, direct, natural conversation with those not yet embedded in tradition? A new Reformation might take place.

Thesis 21 of the manifesto proclaims, "Companies need to lighten up and take

themselves less seriously. They need to get a sense of humor." This thought is expanded in thesis 22: "Getting a sense of humor does not mean putting some jokes on the corporate Web site. Rather it requires big values, a little humility, straight talk, and a genuine point of view."

Like big business, many of our churches and denominations lack "straight talk and a genuine point of view." McDonald's serves burgers and we . . . save souls? Save souls how? How can we state clearly what we stand for? How can we talk straight when we have no easy answers? Where's our humility and our humor?

Reaching Out

The manifesto urges companies to be grounded in their communities: To speak with a human voice, companies must share the concerns of their communities (thesis 34). But first they must belong to a community (thesis 35). Companies must ask themselves where their corporate cultures end (thesis 36). If their cultures end before community begins, they will have no market (thesis 37).

Congregations too must share community concerns, continually seeking out opportunities to serve in neighborhood life. Block parties, food pantries, pet blessings, basketball games, ESL classes, Easter egg hunts, and community dinners and meetings all should routinely take place at the local place of worship. That way, people come to think of it as a vital extension of the neighborhood. Residents must think of the congregation as theirs, even if they are not members or do not attend regularly. The pastor should envision him- or herself as a neighborhood chaplain. Then, in moments of community crisis or transition, the local pastor and the local church will be the logical place to turn. Congregations that choose to remain aloof from the surrounding community run the risk of becoming declining social clubs or aging museums.

Countless numbers of people within sight of our congregations choose to

It is time for our institutional churches to step away from the ways we have done things in the past and discern what we are most passionate about at this moment. Then we need to deepen our roots in our communities.

spend Sunday mornings elsewhere. Imagine what would happen if our cathedrals and congregations suddenly took seriously the thousands of GenXers and Baby Boomers who live within spitting distance of our doors. Our worship experiences might then range from a refined, restrained evensong to a high-energy, multimedia spectacle.

Once upon a time, worship was spectacle; it was one of the basic forms of public entertainment. Now, rather than expanding worship opportunities to meet the needs of the people, we try to limit people's needs so that they fit into the narrow framework of historical worship patterns. To expand the congregation's outreach to unchurched people within the neighborhood, we need to reshape worship in order that God's presence can be made known to all ages, not just to folks who happen to be accustomed to our well-worn worship practices.

Authentic, Accessible, Committed

Three points stand out for me as I read the 95 theses of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*. First, any business or institution that desires to continue attracting new members must possess a readily recognizable authenticity. Second, that institution must know that people not actively involved will be inherently suspicious of the institution. Finally, the institution must unabashedly stand for something—ideally something that major segments of the world find compelling.

At All Saints' Episcopal Church in Chicago, attendance has quadrupled in the past eight years, largely by putting into practice the principles of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*. All Saints' is a congregation made up of overeducated, underpaid people who are left of center theologically, socially, and politically. The average age in the congregation is 36; a third are gay or lesbian. Almost all who attend are college graduates, and most have graduate degrees. The adult population is primarily Anglo but, since more than half of the children in the congregation are adopted, there is great racial diversity among the children. All Saints' is a place where many who attend regularly are mildly embarrassed to admit that they are encountering God and having their spiritual needs met within the confines of the institutional church. Yet they continue to come and to invite their friends to join them. This is a church, they say, that takes the surrounding community seriously without taking itself too seriously.

Simple, Energetic Liturgy

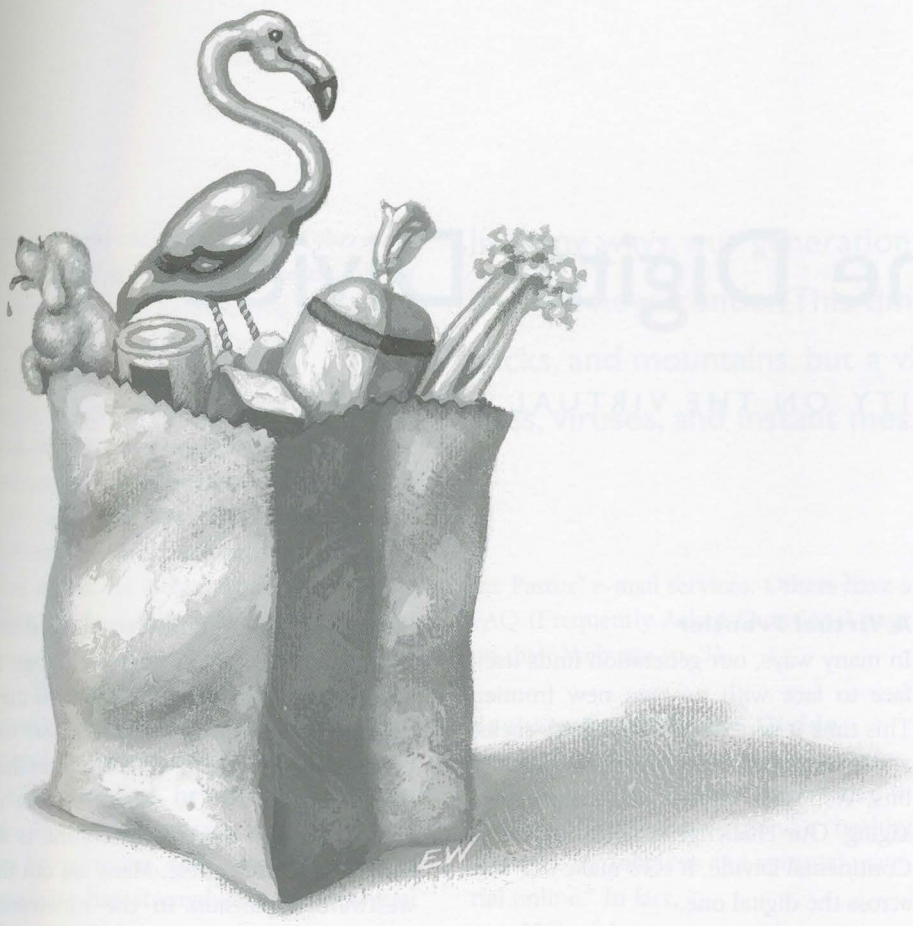
At All Saints', worship and Sunday bulletins are free from rarified church-speak. Instead, the liturgy is simple and energetic. The rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer* do not bind worship; instead they are used to create accessible, interactive services that invite people to join in at their own level of comfort. The Wednesday night Taizé service asks little more of those who attend than to sit, watch the candles flicker, offer a few prayers, and join in several of the mantra-like chants. The 8:00 A.M. Inclusive Language Eucharist on Sunday morning is quiet and extremely intimate. The 10:00 A.M. worship service, with seating in the round, is lively, spirit-filled, and whimsical.

In each service the person officiating is authentic—in his or her beliefs, fears, hopes, doubts, and joys. The officiant and preacher neither hide nor capitalize on their emotions. Instead, emotions are present and acknowledged.

Pink Flamingos for Feast Days

All Saints' is able to poke fun at itself and the institutional church. On major feast days the church lawn is graced with a flock of pink plastic flamingos, usually arranged in a cross formation and inevitably led by a flamingo adorned as a bishop with a purple clergy shirt, a pectoral cross, and a white mitre. On high holy days, instead of a dry red wine the congregation uses champagne for Communion—the officiant pops the cork at the offertory. People who are new hear the unmistakable sound of the cork popping and turn toward the altar in astonishment. The champagne overflows the chalice, and every single person in the room knows that it is a holy feast.

The service with the second largest attendance, surpassed only by Easter, is the annual Feast of St. Francis Pet Blessing. Modeled after a similar service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, pets of all sizes are invited into the sanctuary for the main Sunday service. Ferrets, cockatoos, and retrievers sit, pant, and drool next to one another throughout the liturgy. The choir comes in with their cats under their arms or their dogs on leashes. Scripture readings are done pet in hand, and the rector's dog



is listed as the guest co-preacher. The coffee hour following the service features dog biscuits, kitty bonkers, and gerbil treats, as well as animal crackers and milk for the humans. Water bowls are distributed liberally throughout the sanctuary.

Games and Groceries

This is a congregation with a highly developed sense of irony and play. Its members, most of whom are either GenX or Baby Boomers, have encountered God in a local congregation in spite of their best efforts to remain somewhat distrustful of the institutional church.

Whimsy aside, the congregation is clear in articulating and living out its beliefs. People at All Saints' believe that the gospel is not worth a rat's tail if it doesn't change peoples' lives. As a result, the members are committed to embodying God's love for all people both in and outside the church's walls. On Tuesdays the congregation hosts a community night featuring pizza, piano playing, and games for anyone in the surrounding area. Following the social time, bags of groceries from the pantry are available to any adult who needs assistance with food. Both congregation members and neighbors pack the bags. At the end of the evening there is an equal chance that the person who packed a bag will be eligible to take it home. On any given Tuesday night, more than 75 people gather to connect, do a good deed, and feed their families. It is this sort of involvement in community that the authors of the manifesto invite readers to consider.

What Are We Passionate About?

In the United States today, people have countless ways to spend their time and money. Their time and money, however, are limited. As a result, people are becoming more and more selective—they want to know that with their limited resources they are making a difference. People who are suspicious of the institutional church want to know how the church will change their lives and how its existence and their participation will alter their community. They want to know how this huge institution will make a concrete difference in this place at this time. Will the church make my child's life better? Will it help make me a better person? Or will it just eat up my time on boring matters about which I do not care? The manifesto's 23rd thesis says, "Companies attempting to 'position' themselves need to take a position. Optimally, it should relate to something their markets actually care about."

For the last five years, the Protestant mainline denominations have made gay and lesbian issues a major whipping post for their anxieties. Human rights for all people are indeed important, but why has this topic received such enormous attention, by conservatives and liberals alike, to the near exclusion of other concerns? Why not world hunger? Why not hunger in the United States? Why not stewardship of our planet? Why have we not spent countless media hours bewailing the ecology of our planet or the poverty of our children, rather than arguing over how two consenting adults are allowed to love each other and make a public life together? The Protestant mainline denominations might have a stronger influence on the greater good if they reoriented their priorities and concerns.

The Cluetrain Manifesto is an interesting document—potentially a Reformation-making one. It is time for our institutional churches to step away from the ways we have done things in the past and discern what we are most passionate about at this moment. Then we need to deepen our roots in our communities. Having done that, we need to have some humor and humility as we introduce ourselves to those who may be interested in joining with us to create spirit-filled, dynamic, interactive communities who live out the gospel and change peoples' lives.

Crossing the Digital Divide

NEW FORMS OF COMMUNITY ON THE VIRTUAL FRONTIER

James P. Wind

Almost exactly 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson took office as President of the United States. Arguably, the major achievement of his presidency occurred two years later when, for $15 million dollars, he secured 800,000 square miles of new territory. That colossal real estate deal, which we now call the Louisiana Purchase, forever altered the American experiment.

Almost immediately, a growing tide of explorers, settlers, and rogues advanced westward and over the Great Continental Divide. As they faced mountains reaching heights of 14,000 feet and looked for passes and gaps, these folks tamed a wilderness and discovered secrets about our great land. Many perished in these treks or turned back. A few, like Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, triumphed and became part of the lore of our land.

Inevitably, the first explorers' paths became thoroughfares for many followers. Elijah White led the first wagon train along The Oregon Trail in 1842. By 1869, railroad lines from east and west met in Promontory, Utah. The Continental Divide, which had been a treacherous, uncharted territory frequented only by the bravest explorers, was within 70 years crossed by thousands and settled by many. A nation that had understood itself as a collection of eastern seaboard colonies was reshaped by a new western frontier.

A Virtual Frontier

In many ways, our generation finds itself face to face with its own new frontier. This time it is not uncharted land, rocks, and mountains, but a virtual frontier of bits, Web sites, viruses, and instant messaging. Our challenge is not to cross the Continental Divide. It is to make our way across the digital one.

The brave new electronic world that we face is older than we think. Early trailblazers included Blaise Pascal, who invented the first adding machine in 1642, and Charles Babbage and Augusta Ada Byron, who created a primitive computer called the Difference Engine in 1829. In the 1940s, when Howard Aiken invented the first digital computer, the digital divide began to come into view.

At first, as in Jefferson's day, no one grasped the full significance of this new frontier. But just as railroads quickly followed Conestoga wagons in the nineteenth century, so transistors, microprocessors, and new computer languages soon led to laptops, servers, and networks. In 1973, for the Department of Defense, Vinton Cerf created ARPAnet, a network designed to help the various military services communicate in the event of a natural disaster or nuclear attack. By 1984, that technology had migrated to the private sector and the Internet was born.

Now, vast numbers are exploring a digital world that was unknown just a few decades ago. Over 150 million people in over 100 countries have logged on. Every four seconds, a new Web page is launched into the Internet ether. E-mail delivers more correspondence than the U.S. Postal Service. Dell Computer has sold as much as $30 million worth of computers in a day. Not everyone is an early adapter, of course. Many sat out the westward expansion in the nineteenth century and many—either by choice or circumstance—are not yet citizens of the new wired world. Nonetheless, the world has changed, and those of us in the religious world must learn to live on the other side of the digital divide.

How Are We Doing?

How are congregations and their leaders faring in this new environment? Until recently, we had only anecdotal evidence. The Indianapolis Center for Congregations, for example, has now worked with more than 150 churches and synagogues seeking to move further across this great divide (see page 10). Some of these congregations seemed to be still in the Conestoga wagon stage, with antiquated hardware (or none at all), the wrong software, and staffs ill-trained to navigate in the worlds of bits and bytes. Others are steaming ahead like the great railroads of the nineteenth century, harnessing new technologies in exciting ways.

Recently, the Pew Internet and American Life Project published *Wired Churches, Wired Temples: Taking Congre-*

gations and Missions into Cyberspace (December 20, 2000), the result of the first extensive quantitative survey of church and synagogue use of the Internet. The surveyors admit that their study is not fully representative, since it was sent out by e-mail and thus was sure to miss many congregations that have not yet logged on. But 1,300 congregations did respond, and the results tell us a good deal about the electronic changes taking place in American religion at the local level.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Eighty-three percent of the congregation leaders report that their use of the Internet has helped congregational life. Eighty-one percent say that e-mail use by ministers, staff, and congregation members has strengthened the spiritual life of the congregation to some extent. Ninety-one percent report that e-mail has enabled congregation members and staff to stay more in touch with each other and 63 percent feel that e-mail has helped the congregation connect at least a bit more to the surrounding community (p. 2).

Currently, the majority of these congregations use their Web sites to post mission statements, sermons and other texts, to link to denomination and other faith-related sites, and to encourage visitors to attend. They also link to Scripture studies and devotional material and post schedules, meeting minutes, and other internal communications.

The surveyors found a "broad scope" of online activities already present in American congregational life. Homilies, maps and prayer requests are posted, worship services are Webcast, new members recruited, college-level theology courses offered, reports from mission fields (one from Siberia!) filed, online gatherings for young people hosted, and homework assigned for confirmation classes. Some congregations have "Ask the Pastor" e-mail services. Others have a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page on their Web site (p. 3).

In many ways, our generation finds itself face to face with its own new frontier. This time it is not uncharted land, rocks, and mountains, but a virtual frontier of bits, Web sites, viruses, and instant messaging.

Seekers Crossing the Divide

The Pew study also gives important information about the Internet and religion in general. The researchers found a "healthy audience for religious and spiritual material online." In fact,

> 21% of Internet users, between 19 million and 20 million people, have looked for religious or spiritual information online. This makes the search for religious material a more popular feature on the Internet than the performance of online banking (which has been done by 18% of Internet users), participation in online auctions (which has been done by 15% of Internet users), and the use of online dating services (which has been done by 9% of Internet users) (p. 6).

How many religious users and seekers have crossed the digital divide? "More than two million American Internet users are seeking religious or spiritual material on any given day" (p. 6).

As congregations move into cyberspace, we see new forms of community being created. Some congregations that serve dispersed populations, like Calvary Lutheran Church for the Deaf, are appearing. Church-shoppers vet congregations online before paying a visit, and former members can stay plugged into a cherished congregation's life by logging on. Music leaders check cyber-hymnals for new music, and prayer networks allow people to intercede for each other and follow up in a variety of ways.

Going to the Heart of Ministry

Walter P. Wilson, an evangelical Christian who has founded his own software applications company, is an enthusiastic promoter of the new technologies. His new book, *The Internet Church* (Word Publishing, 2000), presents a case for congregations taking the new technology into the very heart of their ministries. Beyond streamlining administrative processes or improving internal communications, he says, the Internet opens possibilities for preaching the gospel, doing pastoral care, and forming community across once formidable barriers of time and space.

Wilson's own congregation, Calvary Church in Los Gatos, California, crossed the digital divide in four years. Now, messages from distant missionaries reach supporters instantly, people browse online in the church bookstore, the congregation's radio ministry is broadcast globally, and more than 1,000 people a day (in over 30 countries) log onto Calvary's Web site. The church now has a full-time minister of electronic ministry and has invested $125,000 in Web site development (pp. 82-3,125).

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Bringing Technology to Congregations

Aaron Spiegel and John Wimmer

With the approach of the new millennium, we are witness to two seemingly incompatible enthusiasms, on the one hand a widespread infatuation with technological advance and a confidence in the ultimate triumph of reason, on the other a resurgence of fundamentalist faith akin to a religious revival. The coincidence of these two developments appears strange, however, merely because we mistakenly suppose them to be opposite and opposing historical tendencies.

David F. Noble, The Religion of Technology

Theology aside, what we in the trenches of congregational support are experiencing is a passion for embracing technology as a means to better reaching the lives of our congregants. The churches and synagogues we serve are requesting—dare we say demanding—assistance with technology. In response, we at the Indianapolis Center for Congregations created a process to address these issues.

What We Did

In January 1998, the Center embarked on an ambitious project—to teach congregations how to use technology to enhance their ministry. We wanted to include all aspects of technology used by congregations—desktop publishing, member record maintainance, accounting, word processing, communications, the Internet, and presentation and educational software. Our primary goal was to provide a broad view of what's available and to show congregations how to go about accessing the services, hardware, software, and training necessary to implement new or updated technology; we were not to train them in the specifics of any hardware or software.

At first, this seemed such a logical undertaking that we assumed that someone else, somewhere, had already created such a program. Much to our dismay, this was not the case. What followed was a three-month process of interviewing congregations, researching trends, and ultimately creating the curriculum for "Computers and Ministry: Making Technology Work for Your Congregation."

The course was originally planned as a series of three all-day workshops with some on-site consulting. It has evolved, thanks to Lilly Endowment, into a grants program—Computers and Ministry Grants Initiative (CMGI). We realized that to teach congregations about technology and then not provide them with the financial resources to implement it was cruel and unusual punishment!

What We're Learning

As much as we'd like to credit our teaching abilities with the majority of the learning taking place, our data does not necessarily bear that out. The course's most valuable offerings have been on-site consulting visits and the shared learning that goes on between participants.

The on-site consulting visits are made by professionals who are both experienced in current technology and knowledgeable about congregational dynamics. This is where the material covered in the classroom is tailored to the needs of each congregation and where the technology plan (see sidebar on page 12) starts to take shape.

And the shared learning, those casual conversations that take place at breaks and lunch, has proven invaluable, not just to the participants but to us as well. We discovered that congregations—regardless of faith, denomination, size, or the state of their existing technology—were experiencing certain problems in common. They all needed development in four primary areas: administration, communication, education, and worship.

Streamlining Administration

Congregations have been using congregational management software (CMS) since

We discovered that congregations needed development in four primary areas: administration, communication, education, and worship.

the early 1980s. Most CMS packages, like "office suites" of integrated software, offer a variety of administrative and communication functions that reflect the most common activities performed by congregations. While most denominationally sponsored packages are no longer used or available, a host of companies market CMS applications designed to help with budgeting, accounting, attendance, scheduling, and tracking of members, volunteers, and gifts.

Tens of thousands of congregations nationwide are functioning more effectively with the help of CMS technology. We have worked with dozens of congregations, for instance, that kept a typewritten list of members here, financial records on the volunteer treasurer's computer there, and correspondence on the church secretary's PC in the office, with no effective way to share or integrate this information. Any of the major CMS packages can help consolidate administrative information and the pastoral and fellowship functions of the church.

They can enable ministries as well. One church keeps on its database significant dates in the lives of its members. By tracking the date of the death of a spouse, for instance, CMS can remind pastors to make a pastoral call or send a card to the widow or widower. CMS is also widely used to track the financial stewardship of members, and the integrated financial and database functions are easily used to document members' contributions at tax time.

Database and management software also assist churches as they engage in outreach. A well-established missionary Baptist church has given away thousands of pairs of shoes to children in need from the surplus inventory of a vast network of retail stores. But because the church had no effective way of tracking the recipients, the families in need had to take the initiative to find the program. Computer technology has reversed the burden; the church is now using a sophisticated database system to keep track of donors and recipients alike. Now the church can keep inventory information about the shoes, track family information about each child in the program from year to year, and minister to families in the program. The church is also considering ways to use this information to provide other ministries. Computer resources made information available for ministry in ways that the church's human resources simply could not accomplish.

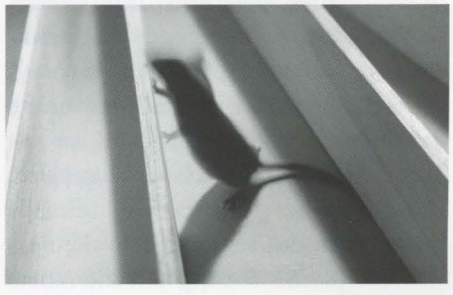
Improving Communications

Beyond CMS and other administrative software, congregations most often use computer technology to improve and expand their communications—both internal and external. Desktop publishing and e-mail are the most frequently sought features. A move to desktop publishing is usually driven by the desire to improve the quality of the printed materials produced by nearly any congregation: worship bulletins, newsletters, correspondence, flyers, posters, and other educational or devotional materials.

E-mail and other Internet-related modes of communication have a great impact on congregational communications and the promotion of fellowship and community-building. They are used for such typical parish activities as sharing prayer concerns, coordinating committee meetings, and providing spiritual advice and support. A United Methodist congregation in Indianapolis was casually asked in a worship service if anyone would be interested in receiving a weekly devotional e-mail. The pastor was flooded with e-mail addresses from members who wanted to take part in the ministry. In an unexpected burst of evangelistic zeal, members then forwarded the e-mail devotions to their friends, neighbors, and coworkers, turning the ministry into a significant expression of outreach for the church. This ministry has opened many opportunities for witness, counseling, and participation in the church's fellowship.

The use of e-mail in internal communications, particularly among congregational staff, has brought about significant improvements for many congregations. It is interesting to note that in a recent Pew study (see James Wind's article on page 8), an overwhelming 97% of respondents from congregations with "high access" to Internet communications said that e-mail "helped congregational staff and members stay in touch."

Existing systems sometimes had to be significantly overhauled before their benefits could be realized. At a large Baptist church, each of the seven staff members had a PC with its own modem and phone line, so that each person was required to access a separate personal America Online account to use e-mail. In addition, varying schedules, a mixture of part-time and full-time staff, and the location of staff offices all over the vast church building made communication among staff entirely ad hoc, ineffective, and inefficient. The PCs were incompatible, and the staff members thought they were incompatible with each other as well! When the church cleared away the incompatible computers and individual AOL accounts, installed new computers connected to a local area network with a



How to Develop a Technology Plan

The goal of the Computers and Ministry Grants Initiative (CMGI) is to create a technology plan that will outline short-, medium-, and long-range goals for implementing technology in a congregation. Here's a process we suggest to create one:

1 **Create a technology team.** This should include stakeholders—people representing the pastoral staff, the office staff, the education staff, the financial board or committee, and other significant interests in the congregation. This approach is essential in the successful implementation of a technology plan because it enlists the ideas and support of all facets of the congregation. Imagine having one individual who works with consultants on a plan, then presents it to the congregation's board, session, or elders only to find out there is no support for implementation!

2 **Use professional help.** This seems a sore subject for many congregations, but our experience has confirmed the belief that volunteers aren't always the best implementers. Professional help used wisely and judiciously will actually save a congregation money. Consultants can assess your current operation and make recommendations about how to implement additional features, suggest vendors of both hardware and software, and manage the project. This help on the front end always saves money because it saves a congregation from making mistakes, most often errors of omission. This is not to say there isn't a place for volunteers working with professional integrators, which is the most effective way of handling a congregation's technology needs.

3 **Include more training than you think you will need.** A common and disheartening scenario for congregations is

single Internet service provider account, they were astonished at how their internal communications improved. Moreover, the monthly fee to connect the church to the Internet was much less than the cost of the individual accounts they had maintained before.

Other Internet technologies, such as Web sites, are also affecting congregational communication dramatically. Most congregations maintaining Web sites tend to use them for internal communication with members about fellowship and upcoming events rather than as a chief outreach tool (though the technology is used for this also, to be sure).

One church, having sent its youth group on a mission trip to South America, wanted to keep the congregation back home informed and involved in the group's activities. The youth group leaders took daily pictures at the mission site with a digital camera and sent them to the folks back home with accompanying e-mails that summarized the group's daily activities, described their feelings and experiences, introduced village children, and sought prayers. All were posted on the church's Web site each day of the trip. At home, an interesting and spontaneous gathering began to take place. Daily, as the pictures and e-mails appeared on the Web site from the mission, the parents of the youth and others gathered in the church to learn the latest news, pray for the people of the village and their youth, and thereby were gathered into the larger cloud of witnesses engaged in mission and ministry.

Nearly all of the 471 rabbis and ministers responding to the Pew survey reported that they use the Internet as their primary source for sermon materials and personal spiritual devotions. Respondents called the Internet a "vast library" of resources for everything from material for services to educational information.

According to a recent study by students at Hartford Theological Seminary, "People who use the Internet to 'shop' for a Church home will likely be turned off by a poorly produced church Web site, while a slick, interactive site could help draw new members in if a church invests the right resources" (Religion News Service, December 13, 2000). The group surveyed 63 individual church Web sites and compiled questionnaires. They found that churches that invest in up-to-date Web sites do a better job of catching the attention of would-be congregants.

Supporting Education

The strong desire of many local congregations to establish learning labs was one of our surprises. A quarter of the congregations that supplied applications to our grants program wanted to either establish or improve a learning lab. Interestingly, many of them seek to use the lab as an outreach program for their surrounding communities in addition to using it as a tool for religious education within the congregation. African American churches that serve impoverished urban areas make especially compelling arguments about how kids in their neighborhoods are often being left out of the digital revolution because they do not have computers at home. Labs in these churches, available after school and for youth programs, can help close this divide.

But many parishes and synagogues recognize that the divide is generational as well as economic. Several churches and synagogues in our program are establishing labs for use by senior citizens as well as by seniors in high school. It is not uncommon for a church computer lab to be used during the morning hours by elderly people learning to send e-mails to their grandchildren and in the evening by a youth group playing Bible software games. In one church's computer lab, the youth group are the teachers and the senior citizens are the students!

It is fascinating that even as intergenerational issues divide churches around issues of worship, many congregations are finding ways for computer technology to bridge generational divisions. Many parishes and churches that have parochial

budgeting only for necessary hardware and software, having it installed, and then discovering no one knows how to use it. Make sure staff and volunteers have adequate access to initial and ongoing training.

4 Talk with other congregations. There is no better resource than a church or synagogue down the street that has already done just what you are going to do. Find out how successful they are at using hardware, software, consultants, training venues, and so on. Be sure to talk with more than one person; often the pastor's perspective is much different than the administrator's!

5 Don't worry about technology passing you by. If you purchase current hardware and software, it's likely that you still will be using the same equipment three to five years from now. Some upgrading will be necessary, especially with software. The changes occurring in the personal computer industry are in large measure governed by the requirements of high-tech games. Unless your staff is going to be playing games in church, today's technology will work just fine for quite some time.

6 Get all your records on computer and back up your data. It is true that storing data on a computer is more secure than storing it on paper. But accidents do happen and data can be corrupted or lost. In such a case, if you have been in the habit of backing up your data you'll be back in business in a matter of hours, rather than days.

7 Expand your technology with your needs. Don't buy things you don't need today or in the next six months. Compatibility is not the issue it once was, and most hardware and software integrate easily.

schools are working especially hard at this. One large Catholic parish in Indianapolis is designing, as part of a new building, a library to serve both parish and school, a prime feature of which will be its computer lab. The parish envisions the lab as a place where young and old, parish member and school student, are all engaged in the common task of growing in knowledge and in faith.

Enhancing Worship

The use of multimedia presentations for worship and education is a glitzy application of computer technology that a number of congregations, even very traditional ones, are seeking to use. Software such as PowerPoint, coupled with projectors or large-screen televisions, are increasingly being used to replace worship bulletins, provide visual sermon outlines, display songs and music, and show illustrative video clips (now catalogued and available online the same way reference books of sermon stories and illustrations have been used by pastors for generations).

Similar multimedia applications—assisted by ever-expanding numbers of software programs—are also gaining wider usage in congregational education programs. Awkward (and often outdated) pull-down maps for Sunday school classes, for example, are being replaced by software-generated images of the Ancient Near East that let Bible students trace the missionary journeys of Paul or follow the exodus route of the Israelites. Classrooms of children can take part in an interactive encounter within Noah's Ark, face down lions in the den with Daniel, or take part in a host of other games that enhance Biblical literacy. As one church in Indianapolis advertises, "This is not the church you grew up in!"

Presentation technology may be attention-getting, but it is also costly in money, time and energy, and in some cases has ignited conflict. Most churches seek to use this technology not for its entertainment value, but for its theological and strategic significance in reaching people.

One very traditional Baptist church in Indianapolis, for instance, was engaged in a far-reaching process to assess its theological mission and ecclesial purpose. As a result of this process, the church decided it was not bringing its message effectively to younger people and that its worship practices would need to be changed. Its decision to use multimedia technology in a new alternative worship service was not driven by the desire to appear relevant or up-to-date. "We always have before us the desire to find the most effective ways of communicating the gospel," said the pastor, "and using these technologies was one way to do that. We are simply using the new technologies to tell 'the old, old story,' as the hymn says."

The bulk of advertising and promotion by vendors is centered on the use of presentation technologies for worship. Perhaps this is in line with popular culture and is an attempt to bring secular habits into congregational worship. Many vendors completely overlook the need for administrative, "back-end" technologies, which support the use of the fancier ones. Very little press is given to the behind-the-scenes support that is necessary to make technology successful in a congregation—technical support, consulting, training, and ongoing planning. For technology to succeed for a congregation, it must become a part of the culture of the church, parish, synagogue, or mosque. All too often, attention is focused on technology only when there is a problem. Then the problem is resolved, only to have the difficulty surface once again. Long-term planning, including budgeting, must become part of the ethos of any congregation seeking to advance technologically. ❁

For advice on choosing and using CMS and creating a Web site, see www.alban.org/periodicals.

Changing the Rules of Engagement

QUESTIONING HOW TECHNOLOGY SHAPES OUR LIVES

David J. Wood

It began when our children were around nine and six years old: Lent was the time when the TV would be turned off. Sundays would be a day of reprieve—after all, Sundays are *in* Lent and not *of* Lent. I wasn't sure whether the tradition would hold this year. While we claim not to watch inordinate amounts of TV (I know of no family that does), TV viewing has increasingly become our pastime of choice. However, as Lent approached and the annual ritual of fasting from TV was presented, the TV was turned off without hesitation or argument.

As every year before, the change that results from this single choice takes us by surprise. Our way of being a household is re-vised. It is no longer tele-vised. More time is spent at table, outside playing, reading, trying new activities. One of our sons has taken up painting miniature soldiers in his newly established workspace in the basement. In so many ways our everyday engagement with one another changes. As the TV recedes to the background, a new foreground comes into view. TV is not demonized, it is simply marginalized. It remains visible, but no longer commands our attention in the same way. This simple decision to ignore the TV opens up space in our life together for new forms of engagement.

Patterns of Our Lives

I relay this experience of our household not to make the case for watching less TV but to help us see the way in which a single technological device has the capacity to pattern our lives in significant ways. The philosopher Albert Borgmann puts it this way, "Once a television set is in the house, the daily decisions whether to read a book, or write a letter, or play a game, or tell stories, or go for a walk, or sit down to dinner, or watch television no longer really ranges over seven possibilities. The presence of television has compressed all alternatives to one whose subalternatives are contained in the question: What are we going to watch tonight?"[1]

Television becomes but one instance of what Albert Borgmann calls the technological pattern of our lives. It was in the spring of 1996 that I first read Borgmann's *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*. My reading of our cultural situation has been under revision ever since. Borgmann says:

> The problems that beset technological societies are thought to be extrinsic to technology; they stem, supposedly, from political indecision, social injustice, or environmental constraints. I consider this a serious misreading of our situation. I propose to show that there is a characteristic and constraining pattern to the entire fabric of our lives. This pattern is visible first and most of all in the countless inconspicuous objects and procedures of daily life in a technological society . . . that characteristic approach to reality I call (modern) technology.[2]

Borgmann's analysis calls for an awareness of the moral significance of the material setting within which everyday life is situated. To a people for whom bread, wine, and water have sacramental significance, and to those who have learned that things are loaded with idolatrous potential, attending to the moral significance of material culture strikes me as a page out of *our* book. Too many of us find ourselves caught up in a way of life that problematizes the wrong things: caring for our children, preparing and eating meals together, reading books, playing musical instruments, writing letters, gathering for prayer and worship, keeping Sabbath, and so on. Most of us have an intuitive sense that the things we live with—and that we seem unable to live without—have something to do with our struggle to live well.

"Tools" as Idols?

Beneath the ubiquitous complaint from pastors and the members of their congre-

gations that they are too busy and out of time, there abides a largely inarticulate ambivalence with the technologically patterned character of our lives. Our capacity to identify, name, and explore this ambivalence is dependent, in part, upon a willingness to question technology and to acknowledge our acquiescence to the way of life technological devices makes possible. For whatever reason—perhaps from a fear of appearing out of sync with the times we are in—the kind of interrogation of everyday life Borgmann is calling for is yet to be undertaken by pastoral leaders. Indeed, it is a common claim that the technological devices that increasingly inundate our everyday lives and structure our daily practices are merely "tools." Consequently, our unreflective adaptation to the way of life mediated by the employment of such "tools" continues unabated.

But surely, "tools" that shape and mediate such realities as words, images, light, time, and space—as well as promise to profoundly increase our capacities for remembering, knowing, and communicating—are tools that warrant theological apprehension and critique. Surely such "tools" are to be regarded, at least, as potential idols in an age so captivated by the promise and momentum of technology. There is a need for us to pay more attention than we have to the theological and moral significance of material culture—particularly to the technological devices that predispose us to, and integrate us into, a particular way of life.

Author Erik Davis, in his book *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic & Mysticism in the Age of Information,* provides a theologically suggestive critique of technology. Towards the conclusion of his exploration of the gnostic tendencies embedded in technology, Davis writes, "Amidst all the distracting noise and fury, the hoary old questions of the human condition: Who am I? Why am I here? How do I face others? How can I face the grave?, sound distant and muffled—like conundrums we have learned to set aside for more pragmatic and profitable queries. Waking up is hard to do when we rush about like sleepwalkers on speed. I suspect that unless we find clearings within our space/time, such questions will never arise in all their implacable awe."[3] Congregational life ought to be one such clearing.

Too many of us find ourselves caught up in a way of life that problematizes the wrong things.

Living Faithful Lives

It is not inconsequential that the practices that constitute the church are pre-technological. There remains a fundamental correspondence between the communities that gathered for worship in the first century and the twenty-first century: electricity was and is not necessary. Incarnation was and is. What is required is that individuals be gathered in time and space in order to pray, sing, confess, pass the peace, break bread, preach, baptize, and read Scripture. These practices have an unmistakable material quality to them and they have the capacity to orient our lives to God and to one another. Deep participation in a face-to-face community of persons that is centered by certain focal practices (singing, confession, prayer, Eucharist, Scripture, preaching, baptism, sharing meals, and so on) mediate to us a knowledge of God, ourselves, one another, and the world that makes our engagement with reality possible.

What would it mean for congregational life to be a place where television and its capacity to order our lives would come into view? What kind of lives would we need to live as individuals, families, and congregations in order for television to become an inconsequential device in the structure of our everyday lives? In our congregations, how much awareness have we developed concerning the existence and use of computers in our homes? This kind of questioning of technology is best done as a response to the question of how our lives are to be oriented, centered, and ordered. As Christians, what do we believe is necessary to the living of faithful lives? What are the practices that bear witness to faithfulness and what are the material conditions that are most conducive to the cultivation of such practices? Raising, let alone answering, such questions requires the grace and courage that comes amidst the fellowship of friends whose common life is embedded in a moral tradition that trains us to regard material culture and its artifacts as anything but neutral.

Moving beyond the question of the use of technology in our homes, we can and should talk about the possible uses of technology in the common life of our congregations. But if such exploration does not also pay careful and disciplined attention to the way that technology uses and shapes us, then we are in danger of reflecting, in our common life, the very distractions and hyperactivity that characterize our culture. As our common life becomes smoother and more efficient with our employment of technological devices, we are getting more done—but are we doing the right things in the right way? As worship services become increasingly focused on and by technological devices, are we losing our capaci-

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Finding Links That Matter at Schultz's Deli

GENX PASTOR ANDREW B. WARNER EXPLORES CONNECTION—OF THE DIGITAL AND HUMAN KINDS

It seems the dot-com revolution is coming to the church. Congregations everywhere are rushing to develop interesting Web sites. Denominations strive to connect. And Christian periodicals laud all of these efforts. The ecclesiastical dot-org movement breezily promises great things: vast information, easy communication, and outreach to the unchurched. Strikingly, the excitement transcends denominational boundaries. From the conservative Church of Christ to the liberal United Church of Christ, my own denomination, everyone is caught up in the Internet buzz. Why is the church so committed to this technology, and might we be losing anything in pursuing it?

Hyper-Hip

Why must the church be Internet-savvy? In the United Church of Christ, pastors have largely embraced Paul Tillich's imperative to make theology relevant. The result is a continual effort to adopt the ways of our contemporary culture. The impulse toward theological relevance

becomes expressed in the desire for technological sophistication. When the average age of clergy is in the high fifties, we may feel a pressing need to relate to the next generation by taking up their technology. The danger is that we will uncritically embrace the Internet out of our own need for a place in our society. The solution to our anxiety is not to don a tie-dyed shirt and ask the youth group what "groovy" things they'd like to do.

Meanwhile, the few young clergy in the United Church of Christ might be motivated by a similar desire to appear current. The discrepancy between the position of young adults in our wider culture and in the church is glaring. From Wall Street to Silicon Valley, young adults are launching e-businesses and captivating the attention of all. Their inventions and ideas drove much of the prosperity of the last few years. Yet in congregations across the country, we young pastors are being asked whether, at 29, we are mature enough to pastor a church of 50 all by ourselves. So participating in the tech boom may offer us a way to prove ourselves to secular peers and demonstrate our importance to the Church.

I suspect the desire of the Church to be Internet-savvy has less to do with technology than with our own feelings of anxiety about our place in the culture at large.

I suspect the desire of the Church to be Internet-savvy has less to do with technology than with our own feelings of anxiety about our place in the culture at large. We worry about being left behind in the dot-org revolution because we've already been left behind in so many other ways. As the mainline denominations become sidelined, we want to be "hip" and "with-it." We need to discern the motivation behind our desire.

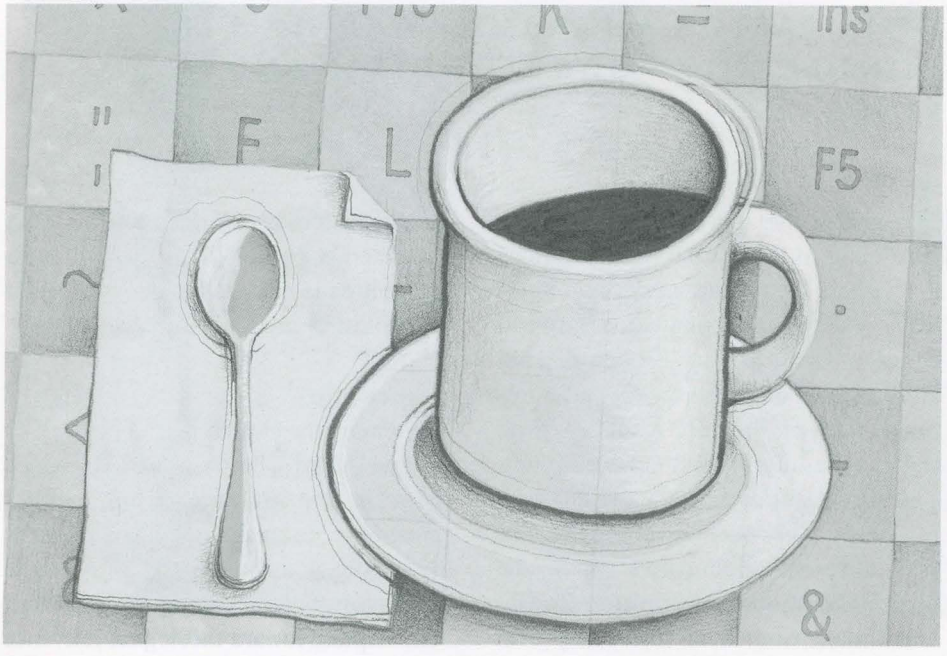
Consumption, not Connection

The value of what we desire is also questionable. Internet technology promises greater access to useful knowledge. The vision is quite grand: the contents of the Library of Congress just a click away. The problem with this vision is twofold.

First, in my experience, Internet sites just do not provide amazing information. Recently, in an effort to understand what the fuss was all about, I prepared for a sermon using various Internet sites. The most cogent material came from republished magazine articles. Since I already subscribed to the magazines, little was new. The bulk of the other commentaries I found were shallow and trite. For my next sermon I returned to my bound John Calvin Commentaries, the promise of stunning cyber-information as yet unfulfilled.

The Internet is still maturing, and it may one day provide access to unique and insightful perspectives on Scripture. But the second problem with Internet technology is unlikely to go away—the social cost of acquiring information on the Web.

The Internet provides information easily, but at the expense of more engaging ways of learning. We are spared the burdensome work of attending clergy study groups, opening up dusty volumes at the library, or undertaking the almost unheard-of task of freshly translating a passage from Greek or Hebrew. The Internet aspires to provide a product, in this case quality biblical insight, without the engagement of burdensome practices. The first concern, the quality of information, may be resolved in the future. But the second concern, the loss of engage-



ment, is likely to become even more pressing.

In my own Internet experiment, there was much that did not happen. I skipped the library, both my own and the local university's, because the information was coming through my phone line. More important, I missed sitting with my local clergy group and talking with them about the text. It may be that the Internet provided greater insights than my colleagues could muster, but I simply consumed them without exchanging, deepening, or furthering the ideas. The clergy group is a far richer experience.

Breakfast Links

Four or five of us pastors meet for breakfast at a greasy local diner called Schultz's Deli. The food is unremarkable, but the service is friendly. Sue, our waitress, knows our eating habits and asks about our children. The room is decorated with an American flag, beer signs, and pictures of duck hunting. Schultz's is not sophisticated and glamorous, but it is more real and socially rich than any Web site.

The breakfast conversation ranges from Scripture to local events to the difficulty someone is having with an organist. We talk about the concerns our congregations will have with a text and what song we might sing before the gospel reading. We talk about how the week went and share stories from Sunday school. One of us is planning a regional confirmation retreat and another is going on a denomination-sponsored mission trip.

As breakfast arrives—corned beef hash, eggs over easy, Tabasco sauce on the side—I brag about my son walking for the first time. Someone else shares pictures her three-year-old took. Invariably, we name to each other our worries and delights. We tell each other how to pray for us and our ministries.

In a sense, the clergy group is a burdensome activity. I must rouse myself to attend. I must commit to participating. I must listen to interpretations of Scripture that do not directly help me prepare a sermon. But the clergy group engages me in ways the Internet never can, feeding my body and tending my soul.

Most important, the practice of attending a clergy group grounds me in my local community. Our commitment to each other becomes the way in which the Body of Christ is knit together. I have only a virtual connection to the folks on a Web site. But the pastors and people at Schultz's Deli offer a type of engagement that no amount of clicking will provide. In this specific, local setting I find the links that matter for my ministry.

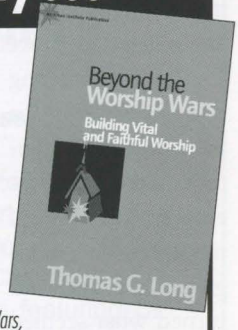
> It may be that the Internet provided greater insights than my colleagues could muster, but I simply consumed them without exchanging, deepening, or furthering the ideas.

Choosing Engagement

Writers need to disclose their own biases and entanglements, so I need to admit that I am working with friends to launch an Internet site (www.christclarionfellowship.org). Here, young clergy can find information relevant to their ministries. More important, they can use the site to find peers in their part of the country. The site's mission is to make sure young clergy find their way to the Schultz's Deli in their neighborhoods. In this case, the Internet does not replace local gatherings but helps to facilitate the formation of such groups.

As the Church moves forward with technology, we need to ask ourselves why the Internet is so appealing. What lack are we compensating for in the rush to be knowing and sophisticated? What may be lost in using the Internet? I would hope we do not use it to replace the clergy breakfast at Schultz's Deli. Our menu choices may not always benefit our bodies, but the engagement is wonderful for the Body of Christ. Perhaps we should be rushing to be connected with each other at the greasy spoon. ✪

From War to Worship Harmony . . .



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The Digital Revolution

CHANGING THE "HOW" OF MINISTRY, NOT THE "WHAT"

Ian Evison

Has the digital revolution changed anything fundamental about ministry?

When I entered ministry in 1982, I began by using an array of gadgets that were not state-of-the-art but were typical of what a congregation of modest means could supply at the time. I typed my sermons on a Smith-Corona typewriter. For small numbers of copies we used a mimeograph machine. For larger projects like the newsletter and the order of service, we used a Gestettner duplicating machine, which—as I recall—produced copies by the controlled oozing of ink through a stencil. We made labels with a system that employed a metal embossed plate for each address. When we needed to add people or change addresses we sent to a company for new address plates and—until they arrived—handwrote the new addresses. Our audiovisual equipment consisted of a filmstrip projector, an overhead projector, and a Bell and Howell 16-mm movie projector.

In the ensuing two decades, a parade of new digital inventions has entered the life of ministers and congregations and has turned what seemed to me a passably adequate set of tools into museum artifacts (though some may argue about the overhead projector). The parade was led by desktop computers (my first was a Kaypro, with 9.5-inch floppies, a CPM operating system, and a WordStar word processor), followed by dot-matrix printers, faster computers, affordable copiers, modems, e-mail, fax machines, yet faster computers, pagers, cell phones, database programs, read-only CDs for data storage, Web sites, the Internet, PowerPoint, PageMaker, dedicated lines for Internet access, read-write CDs, and even faster computers.

What's Really Changed?

The Internet has opened a world of resources. Want an idea for a newsletter column? Review the latest religion news at the Religion News Service (www.religionnews.com). Looking for a place to chat about your struggles as a clergy spouse? Try the "Neither Fish Nor Fowl" chat group at Ecunet (www.ecunet.org). Are you a student of the Islamic faith at a college with no Islamic group? Access www.ummah.com/chat. Do you need, at 4 A.M., the words of Hildegard of Bingen's hymns? A quick Internet trip to the University of Mainz (www.uni-mainz.de/~horst/hildegard) will locate them, in either English or German. Would you like a Biblical commentary on 1 Corinthians? Bible.crosswalk.com/commentaries give you a number of options, but only those old enough (50 years) to be in the public domain. Want to know what the Talmud says about angels or anything else? Check www.aishdas.org. Curious whether the word "religion" really comes from roots meaning "to bind together"? Try "religion etymology" in your favorite search engine. Need assistance in your study of the lectionary portion for the week? Try www.satucket.com/lectionary. Truly desperate for a sermon about that lectionary portion? See "Sermon and Sermon-Lectionary Resources."

Yet, as impressive as all this might be, one might still ask whether these innovations have changed anything fundamental.

It could be argued that for the most part, they are changing the "how" of ministry more than the "what." After the online assist in sermon preparation, almost all clergy preach before a physically gathered congregation. What's more, even with all the benefits online religion may hold out for some, are we not to be judged by how we serve those who have least? So far, those who have the least are a long way from being able to afford computers or fax machines or cell phones.

With all the benefits online religion may hold out for some, are we not to be judged by how we serve those who have least? So far, those who have the least are a long way from being able to afford computers or fax machines or cell phones.

As if to add an exclamation point to this more sober assessment of the digital revolution, many of those who made the largest claims for its significance for religion have recently been caught in the dot-com crash. Crosswalk.com, a site that promised to bring about a "dramatic improvement" in the integration of life and faith, announced a layoff of 23 percent of its employees in January.

What Does the Future Hold?

Where does the truth lie? It seems clear that many of the most sweeping claims for the significance of the digital—and especially Internet—revolution are as yet unproven and that many of the rest of us will need to try hard not to indulge in the singular satisfaction of watching the prideful eat humble pie. And yet it would be equally blind to take the current troubles of the dot-com economy as justification for minimizing the significance of the changes that have taken place.

While these changes have so far been greatest on the administrative side of congregational life, they continue to extend themselves in every direction. Microsoft stock may be down, but nobody is contemplating bringing back the mimeograph. Each new computer will be far more capable than the one it replaces.

It is true that the digital revolution is disproportionately a revolution by and for the prosperous. Yet easy generalizations can mask important realities. The prospect of free online resources may be especially important to those who live in inner cities, rural areas, and developing nations. These are groups for whom the cost and limited availability of traditional print resources may be barriers.

Furthermore, the changes that have already taken place are laying the groundwork for greater ones. In general, when computer use for groups reaches a critical level (two-thirds to three-fourths) the tendency is for it to quickly become nearly universal. While e-mail and Internet use in congregations has lagged, in the last year it has increased strongly. These media are set to become a primary means of communication in many ministries and many congregations. They won't replace face-to-face meetings, but they may replace the telephone tree and the postal service.

What will happen then? Whatever it is, it is yet to be invented by congregations and by those leading ministries. But when it is invented, it may yet change fundamental things about ministry. ❁

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Why Congregations Matter

Part 2

CONGREGATIONS asked freelance writer Marlis McCollum to interview key leaders in American religion about their perspectives on the importance of congregations. In this second of our two-part series, Robert Edgar, Isa Aron, Donald Miller, and Mark Chaves describe how congregations can make a difference.

One Step at a Time

INTEGRATING FAITH AND ACTION

The history of Christianity in the United States is a portrait of broad strokes and vivid hues placed on the expansive canvas of this continent. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed so long ago, the churches play a central role in our culture. This moment in American history is no exception. Religious beliefs and affiliations remain an important facet of our lives. For most American Christians, this is best represented by the realities of congregational life. It is in local congregations that we are regularly renewed by worship, sustained in life's trials by the sacraments, and joined with others in service to our communities and to the larger world.

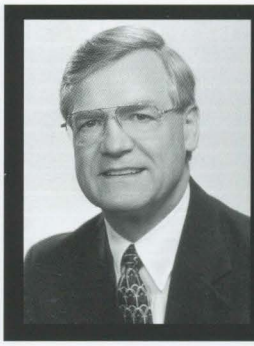
The well being of local congregations, then, is important to the faith of the individual believer and to the communities in which they are located. Well-rounded congregations are what is needed now. If churches address the spiritual needs of their constituents but not the care of others, they are failing to live the essence of their biblical traditions. If churches emphasize social action but fail to address the spiritual hunger of their members, they fail their members and their mission as well. People need both to be nurtured by their faith and to express that faith in the world.

Steps Toward Making a Difference

What are some important steps that a congregation could take that demonstrate an integration of faith and action and that help make a difference in our world? Here are a few.

Collaborate. In the last century, we may have moved too far away from the large parish concept of the Roman Catholic Church by establishing a proliferation of Protestant congregations that have often competed rather than cooperated with one another. Now we are beginning to recognize that it is through collaborative rather than competitive efforts that we can develop stronger congregational ties.

Cooperation with other Christian traditions will be crucial in the coming years. One of the goals of the National Council of Churches is to work with churches of different faith traditions to broaden the ecumenical table. Our vision is a table that includes not only our own members, but also Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Roman Catholics. Together, these representatives of diverse theological positions can find ways to work with one another in common cause, for example, in addressing the needs of the poor.



Rev. Dr. Robert W. Edgar

General Secretary, National Council of Churches

This may be a new concept for many churches, but it is a concept that can benefit us all—in churches and in the broader society.

Honor minority views. Another area in which congregations can gain from a shift in their thinking has to do with the democratic process. Congregations and denominations need to recognize that God's will cannot be discerned simply by majority vote. We have organized congregations and denominations around democratic voting practices, yet we must recognize that, within a congregation at any one time, the minority may be right. As we move forward, it will be important for us to find ways to honor positions held by the minority rather than shutting off dialogue because it doesn't conform to the majority view.

Get political. I would also like to see congregations lose their fear of politics and elected officials. The separation of church and state is an important part of our American heritage, but it should never be used to separate people of faith from institutions of government. Nor should it suggest that people of faith have no role in the many public policy initiatives that have faith implications. Congregations that follow the call and the covenant of the Old and New Testaments can and should have a great impact on public policy, as the dictates of faith require.

Communication with elected officials, if done properly, is a way congregations can have a positive impact and witness in the world. During my years of service in Congress, I often advised people to honor the golden rule, to treat their elected officials as they would like to be treated. It is this approach that, I believe, yields the most positive results. The best communication takes place eye to eye, in the local district, and it takes place in careful discussion that emphasizes dialogue rather than a one-way stance on the issue at hand. Dialogue on political issues should also be encouraged within the congregation. Without taking sides, pastors need to provide opportunities for all sides of the issues to be heard. A church that is open to a variety of points of view is a healthy church and can gain much from such a candid exchange.

Learn conflict resolution. While involvement in the political process can be an effective ministry, not all public witness is legislative in nature. Many issues that do not have a legislative solution require conflict resolution. For this reason, I urge churches to learn conflict resolution techniques and practice them within their own communities.

Over the next 10 or 15 years, theological schools need to add courses in conflict resolution to the curriculum, and pastors and lay leaders already in the field need to be encouraged to include conflict resolution as one of the roles they can play in their communities. A possible source of funding for conflict resolution training may be the foundations that already support religious groups. As a part of this training, we need to enable spiritual leaders to discern the Spirit in issues of conflict. In times of trouble, such abilities contribute much to the wider community.

Be impatient. Congregations can make an even greater difference by refusing to be patient in the face of injustice and human need. Churches serve faithfully by recognizing the urgency of the most pressing issues confronting the world today. World hunger is urgent. Poverty among children is urgent. Violence around the world is an urgent concern. When faced with issues like these, faithfulness requires the passion of impatience. In such settings, it is time for us to set aside our patient ways and to speak out and to take action.

Model inclusion. Pastors and the members of their congregations can also make an important difference simply by modeling a different way of being—a way of tolerance and inclusion. Congregations are blessed with unique opportunities to build bridges with people of religious traditions that are different from their own. Churches increasingly share pulpits. They help their congregations better understand the Muslim community, the Jewish community, and other religious communities in their area. They help to communicate respect for diversity, and engender peace and cooperation.

The vibrant life of American congregations within the context of our American culture offers rich opportunities for the free exercise of our deepest religious convictions. Across the country today, clergy and laity together are finding renewed energies for witness and service to those in need, as well as a deepening of faith. We remain confident that congregational life will, by God's grace, continue to make a difference one step at a time. ❖

When faced with issues like hunger, poverty, and violence, faithfulness requires the passion of impatience.

To Repair the World

CONGREGATION AS HOUSE OF WORSHIP, COMMUNITY, AND STUDY

Isa Aron, Ph.D.

Professor of Jewish Education, Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles, and Founding Director of the Experiment in Congregational Education

With each successive generation, the congregation has become increasingly important to American Jews as the locus of Jewish community and the touchstone of Jewish identification.

There was a period in our history when secular Judaism was very lively, when many Jews lived in Jewish neighborhoods, spoke Yiddish, read Jewish literature, and maintained close ties with Israel, but that experience is not so common anymore. While secular Jewish traditions remain alive, they have been difficult to transmit from one generation to the next. As a result, identity has been increasingly constructed as religious, and religion is seen as the center of community.

Tikun Olam

The Jewish concept of congregation is three-pronged: The synagogue is called, in Hebrew, a *beit t'fillah,* a house of worship; a *beit knesset*, a house of community; and a *beit midrash,* a house of study. These functions are considered inextricably intertwined.

By extension, the notion of a synagogue as a house of community means that it functions as the center for *tikun olam,* the repair of the world. Because of the great diversity within and among congregations, this mission may be expressed in a variety of ways. For some, *tikun olam* translates into political action; for others, it may speak to social action, or the creation of a caring community. Although congregations provide forums for the discussion of political and social issues such as school vouchers and gun control, the congregation is not asked to adopt a single position.

If the membership happens to be of one mind on a particular issue, a synagogue might choose to take a stand politically or to participate in a demonstration. Most Jewish congregations, however, are composed of people with diverse views, so *tikun olam* is more typically expressed in less controversial activities, such as sponsoring a homeless shelter, a soup kitchen, or a tutoring program.

While the form of the action differs from one community to the next, I believe that congregations ought to provide their members with a greater number of outlets to fulfill this imperative to repair the world.

I believe that congregations ought to provide their members with a greater number of outlets to fulfill this imperative to repair the world.

Focus on Learning

At the same time, synagogues need to be doing a better job of fulfilling their other roles. They need to work at making worship more compelling and meaningful, and they need to create a richer, more supportive community for their members.

Of particular interest to me is the need to promote learning, for both young and old. Especially among adults, there is a renewed interest in the Hebrew language and a new interest in studying sacred texts. Synagogues must become congregations of learners, finding new ways of involving an ever-widening cohort of learners in deeper and more engaged study. Finally, synagogues need to become learning congregations, organizations which are reflective and deliberative, continually assessing their activities and challenging themselves in new ways.

Sometimes support from outside the congregation is needed to enable a synagogue to accomplish these ambitious goals. Fortunately, such support is available. Each of the Jewish movements (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist) has a central office that works with congregations, putting them in touch with needed resources and suggesting new approaches to old dilemmas.

Every congregation needs help in keeping up with the changing needs of its members and of the Jewish community at large, in envisioning goals beyond what has already been done, and in taking on new and ambitious challenges. The Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE), a project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, has spent nearly a decade working intensively with Jewish congregations, guiding them through a task-force process through which they can become both congregations of learners and learning congregations. Within a year, the ideas and resources of the ECE will be available to all congregations over the Internet. ❖

Congregation as Conduit

HOW CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES CAN CONNECT

Donald E. Miller, Ph.D.

Professor of Religion and Executive Director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Southern California

To understand the importance of congregations and the differences they make in our communities, it is important to recognize that religion is multidimensional. For church members, congregations are places to come together with others of like beliefs to worship. They are a source of strength and support, and of consolation in times of crisis. They are a place to celebrate rites of passage related to birth, adolescence, marriage, and death. But they are also places that ask us to think outside ourselves and to feel a responsibility to and connection with the communities in which we live and work. In that sense, congregations are sociological institutions that exist, in part, to address issues that are of common concern to members of a larger community.

Making an Impact in Los Angeles

The county of Los Angeles is a prime example of the impact that congregations can have on the larger community. What has impressed me about the thousands of churches, synagogues, and mosques in this area is the social role that these congregations play, particularly within minority and immigrant communities. For instance, there are mega-churches, particularly in the African American community, that engage in social ministries ranging from low income housing construction to job readiness programs to small business loan and mentorship programs.

There are also many churches in Los Angeles County that serve a variety of immigrant populations. In these churches, social service programs often take the form of helping members gain access to health care and find housing or employment. Beyond helping to fulfill these basic needs, many of these churches also help their members to become integrated into American society by helping them learn English, educating them about the American system of democratic government, assisting them in becoming citizens, and encouraging them to vote.

But, at the same time that these churches are helping their members acclimate themselves to the new culture in which they are living, they are also helping to preserve the culture from which they came. For members of these congregations, church events provide opportunities to speak their native language, eat foods from their homeland, and to celebrate rites of passage in ways that are traditional for them. Members of these churches often make connections that allow them to create "extended families" that substitute for the extended families they left behind when they came to the United States, and the church can also be a conduit for other immigrants wishing to come to the United States, providing a contact point and a supportive community through which new immigrants can enter this new world.

Another important function that I believe churches fulfill is the humanization of social service delivery. This was exemplified by the huge rush of support from congregations in both inner city and suburban neighborhoods after the riots that ensued following the trial of the police officers charged with brutality against Rodney King. In addition to cleaning up debris and providing food to citizens in areas where stores had been burned out, churches responded to this crisis by attempting to create partnerships between inner city and suburban churches across the racial divide in an effort to reweave the social fabric that the riots had rent apart. It was churches who created opportunities for people to talk to each other about the conflicts and feelings that had given rise to the riots, and worked toward healing the divisions between groups.

Congregations Can't Do It Alone

Despite their success with so many social service endeavors, it is important to recognize that churches do not wish to carry the burden of societal needs alone. A recent survey of California churches revealed that, although over 90 percent of all churches provide some type of community service, pastors were nearly unanimous in the view that the church could not take over the social welfare role of the state. Churches can and do, however, serve in an advocacy role on behalf of the disenfranchised. Through community organizing, churches can put pressure on government to be responsive to the needs of those who might otherwise be powerless. State-based organizing movements, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) or the Pacific Institute of Community Organizing (PICO), can give a collective power and voice to small and mid-sized congregations who may not be able to make themselves heard otherwise.

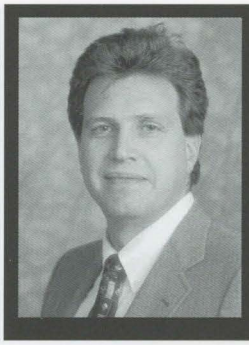
Churches may need to seek support for their social service efforts, as well, through partnerships with foundations or with government. All Saints' Episcopal in Pasadena, of which I am a member, is an example of the effectiveness of this strategy, having been the catalyst for a $14 million grant from the James Irvine Foundation that will provide after-school activities for youth by bringing together public schools, libraries, museums, and athletic and a variety of other neighborhood-based programs.

continued on next page

Contributing in a Particular Style

FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY

Congregations get a lot of attention, and rightly so, in connection with the social services they provide. But the National Congregations Study, funded by the Lilly Endowment and completed last year, has revealed that the contributions American congregations make in this area are noteworthy more for their uniquely personal quality than for their number or size. "It is not so much the amount of activity that congregations do," says Mark Chaves, associate professor of sociology at the University of Arizona and principal investigator in the study, "but that they do it in a particular way, with a particular style."



Mark Chaves, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Arizona, and Principal Investigator of the National Congregations Study

Chaves says that while only a small minority of congregations—mainly the larger ones—are intensively engaged in social services, their involvement follows a typical pattern: "What they mainly do is organize small groups of volunteers to do some well-defined task periodically, things like sending five people to cook dinner at a homeless shelter every Wednesday night or having a youth group that spends the summer painting schools."

The congregation's distinctive edge, Chaves says, lies in its ability to make available these small volunteer groups, which average only about ten people in size. He suggests that if a government or community agency were looking for a way to get congregations involved in its initiatives, the way to do it would be to develop programs that made use of such groups.

Congregations in poorer neighborhoods, the study found, are usually more socially active if they have a contingent of middle-class people coming in from outside the community to attend church. "I think it's a resource issue," says Chaves. "Congregations with middle-class constituencies have more resources to do these kinds of things."

Political Involvement

According to the study, it is fairly common for congregations to be politically involved in some way. About a third of those who attend religious services hear announcements from the pulpit about opportunities for political activity, and about a quarter have received voter guides from their congregations.

In addition, 20 percent of American churchgoers belong to congregations that organized or participated in some kind of demonstration during the past year. Smaller percentages of survey respondents said that their churches engaged in voter registration or lobbying activities. Even fewer (6 percent) reported that the churches they attend have invited a candidate for public office to address the congregation.

Although, says Chavez, the proportion of church members involved in political activities represents a clear minority, "for organizations that are not at their core political organizations, those are kind of high numbers."

Interestingly, the study showed that congregations are cultural and artistic organizations much more than they are social service or political organizations. They may engage in community by putting on performances or making the church building available for community productions. Further, notes Chaves, an artistic emphasis is often seen in the normal work of the congregation, that is, in worship services. "Obviously," he says, "there's a lot of artistic stuff that happens in worship services even though people don't tend to think of it [that way]. Music is the most obvious example, but also dramatic performances—both kids and adults doing skits or pageants, making banners and that kind of thing."

Miller

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Making Time to Turn Within

In addition to seeking support for their community efforts, churches also need to take care of their own if they are to continue their good work both within and outside their congregations. First, they need to provide their pastors with opportunities for thinking outside their own experience. Denominational offices and places like the Alban Institute can play a valuable role in this regard because they offer conferences, retreats, and think-tank groups in which clergy can participate and cross-fertilize each other's imaginations, rethink their organizational structures, and get insights as to how they might more accurately assess the needs of their congregations and communities.

There is a need, too, for both clergy and the members of their congregations to have quiet spaces and times to focus, to meditate, and to draw on a higher power. Churches may have to seek outside resources to fulfill that need, whether it be from individuals who can facilitate meditative experiences or retreat centers that simply provide the space and silence we all need—to renew ourselves and our faith, to reexamine ourselves and our moral responsibilities, and to return strengthened and refreshed to our lives in our congregations and communities.

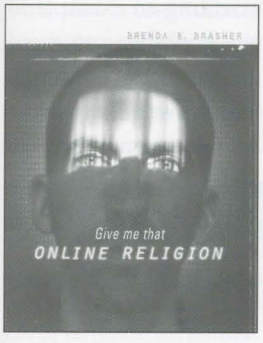
BOOK REVIEW

Give Me That Online Religion

Brenda E. Basher
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001

According to an ongoing survey of Americans by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, more than two million of us seek religious or spiritual material on the Internet every day. (See "Wired Churches, Wired Temples" at www.pewinternet.org).

Many of the available sites, such as the official sites of major churches and denominations and a rapidly growing number of congregational sites, are quite conventional. Most of these sites are designed for one-way communication. They convey to followers and seekers important information about the sponsoring organization and its activities and beliefs.



But what do we know about the unconventional sites? Brenda Basher, described on the back cover of her book as "a frequent media commentator on online religion and millennialism," explores and explains the symbiotic relationship between the Internet and a great deal of religious experimentation that is being done by quite unconventional individuals and groups.

One of the traits of the Internet is that no one is in charge. Anyone can put anything on it. If a site finds its audience, it can develop a large international following quickly. The author provides one astounding example. Jack Van Impe, the televangelist who specializes in applying apocalyptic sections of the Bible to newspaper headlines, launched a site in 1995. Today, he claims 30,000 subscribers for his weekly online newsletter.

What are the consequences of linking freewheeling religious experimentation to the power of the Internet? Basher describes several.

Traditional churches and religious movements have always exerted an authoritative influence over believers and seekers. The Internet eliminates such controls. Indeed, the author argues, religious experimentation on the Internet will influence historic religious institutions more than those institutions have so far influenced, or perhaps can influence, the content and culture of the Internet.

This is frightening and exhilarating at the same time. In one scary example, Basher goes into some detail about the crucial role the Internet played in the horrific story of the Heaven's Gate movement, which resulted in the group suicide of 39 followers in March 1997. Although started in the 1970s, the movement found its following through its Web site in the 1990s. As the suicides were methodically carried out, one remaining member posted the group's final manifesto. Among the constructive developments, Basher cites the prevalence of humor, especially on nonofficial religious sites that poke affectionate fun at the church.

The reader who expects a thoughtful, scholarly work with serially developed arguments and careful documentation will be disappointed. The book's style reflects a characteristic of the Internet: ideas are "hyper-linked." Rather than treating an idea fully in one place and moving on logically to the next, Basher returns to several basic themes repeatedly, piling nuance on nuance until the reader gains a rich, complex understanding. Congregational leaders, however, will not find many tips for direct use.

Still, *Give Me That Online Religion* is provocative. Large questions, about the ambiguous relationship between humankind and the machines we invent, about the relationship between mainstream religions and the groups who test boundaries, about the horror and the nobility of human nature as revealed in an environment where no one is in charge, and about the future of global religions, are at least asked. Perhaps Basher's academic interest in millennialism led her to begin her reflection on the link between religion and the Internet with exotic examples. But as she says near the beginning of the book, she believes that "online religion is crucial to and positive for the future of religion."

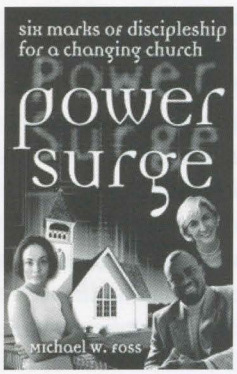
Rev. Frank M. Harron II
Trinity Church, Wall Street
New York, New York

BOOK REVIEW

Power Surge

SIX MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP FOR A CHANGING CHURCH

Michael W. Foss
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000



Power Surge is written for leaders of the church in the postmodern world—a world that no longer requires ministers as managers and "pastors as CEOs," but one that needs servants and disciples.

The book, which Foss wrote out of his own leadership of Prince of Peace, a Lutheran church in Burnsville, Minnesota, springs from the contrast he sees between the membership-driven church and the discipleship-driven church. On the membership-driven side, we have a church that seemingly cares only for maintaining itself. Clergy who serve membership churches can expect to suffer burnout trying to live up to ever-expanding expectations. Worse yet, the membership model generates exclusivity, not the inclusivity of discipleship.

Foss urges clergy to abandon chaplaincy and to take up the leadership that puts the leader on equal footing with the membership, acknowledging the mutual need of grace.

The six marks of discipleship about which Foss writes are engraved on cards that every Prince of Peace member carries, and they are the substance of every relationship in the church, including those among staff members. They are:

1. Pray daily.
2. Worship weekly.
3. Read the Bible.
4. Serve at and beyond the Prince of Peace.
5. Be in relationship with others to encourage spiritual growth.
6. Give of my time, talent, and resources.

While the book makes critical points about modern social life, much as Eddie Gibbs does in *ChurchNext* (Intervarsity Press, 2000), and about the social context for ministry, Foss' emphasis is on creating a handbook for church leaders. He crams the book full of important instruction on how to write vision and mission statements and how to lead the leadership board into "governance" and away from "operational administration." Foss' suggestions for developing team ministries out of committees are particularly helpful. His emphasis on the need for leadership to develop a spiritual life, along with his candor about his personal shortcomings, strengthens the book.

Foss continues today as pastor of Prince of Peace, providing an example to mainline churches of how they can avoid the narrow limits of liberal and conservative definitions, avoid growth for growth's sake, and still develop as strong, spiritual communities.

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey L Bullock
Saint Barnabas on the Desert
Scottsdale, Arizona

Wind

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Wilson claims that his congregation has created new forms of community that allow people to interact from around the world in what the computer folks call "real time," which means that people are freed from the hassles and delays of normal communication patterns. In the safe space of e-mail, inquirers can ask spiritual questions and receive an individualized response. Young people, senior citizens, and even members of the adult Bible class are now weaving new patterns of interaction, care, and spiritual formation.

No Turning Back

Others, of course, are more cautious. Some question just how real virtual community can be. Others worry that this new medium, with its 24/7, always-on style will further erode the boundaries of sacred time and space. Still others express concern about the dangers of what has been called the "world's largest anarchy"—the Internet. Concerned that when no one is in control, bad things can happen, these folks are appropriately cautious.

But the world has crossed the divide. There can be no turning back as more and more log on and make their own crossings. Those of us who live in and care about local congregations cannot turn back the digital clock. But we can help congregations and their leaders find their way in a world where no government and no denomination can control the flow of information and ideas. With courage and vision we can become, as our predecessors were, creative users and shapers of an amazing new human discovery.

BOOK REVIEW

Calling and Character

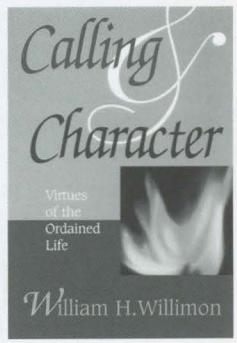
VIRTUES OF THE ORDAINED LIFE

William H. Willimon
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000

William H. Willimon's application of his often insightful and occasionally biting perspectives to the matter of clergy ethics and character could not be better timed. Given the demise of the Constantinian view of Christendom, terrible clergy scandals, and a loss of clerical vision, there is a danger that we ministers "might 'black out,' that is lose consciousness of why we are here and who we are called to be for Christ and his church" (p. 21). While our work continues to be demanding and confusing, it is imperative that we have a clear sense of our purpose and character.

Willimon explores the challenges and paradoxes that go with being official, ordained leaders. He is well aware of all the hardships of ministry, such as the fishbowl existence, exposure to conflict and unrealistic expectations, and the need to maintain boundaries. The church, he notes, has peculiar understandings of leadership and hierarchy, using strange, counterintuitive terms alluding to "service" and even "slavery." Willimon dismisses liberal Western ideas of freedom, autonomy, and liberation as being incompatible with Christian thought. He argues instead for a biblical communitarian ethic of accountability, deep engagement, and the overcoming of the secrecy and isolation of our society.

While he does not necessarily dismiss the word "professional," Willimon uses it cautiously. Ministry is certainly not an occupation that one would choose for ordinary reasons, and most emphatically we should not choose it out of ambition or self-aggrandizement. Rather, "the church enjoins us to remember that we are called, that ministry is God's idea before it is ours" (p. 23), and thus we are challenged to keep faith in it. The author cites Richard Neuhaus, who said, "there is a necessary awkwardness about Christian ministry because we are ambassadors of a 'disputed sovereignty.'" Willimon concurs, noting that we contend with principalities, powers, and a gospel that is counter to our culture (p. 31). The chal-



July Seminars for Bishops, Executives, Clergy Focus on Leadership Development

LEADERSHIP ENRICHMENT SEMINARS
For Clergy, Judicatory Executives and Lay Leaders

Leadership Institute for Bishops and Executives (LIBE)

Led by Gil Rendle and James P. Wind July 16-20, 2001 Baltimore, MD

"Bishop," "Executive," "Conference Minister," "Superintendent"—senior leadership roles may be titled differently, even as they share many common features across denominations and traditions. Led by Alban Institute's President James P. Wind, and Director of Education, Gil Rendle, this highly regarded annual forum is crafted to meet the needs of church leadership in the dynamic, fast-changing environment of 2001 and beyond.

Like all Alban events, the learning atmosphere will be collegial, interdenominational, and interfaith, with a focus on the practical issues faced by senior leaders. The seminar format will include lectures, small group discussions, and leader-to-leader conversations for shared learning, with time for both worship and recreation. A reading list and instructions for preparing a case study will be sent prior to the seminar. Explore the dynamics of your own emerging role as a bishop or executive, set within the context of the major issues facing American religion:

- What do congregations need from their denominational leaders in a time of change?
- Explore new and effective ways to lead in times of fundamental change
- Clarify your primary work and that of your staff by articulating your system's core process
- Review trends, recognize transitional issues affecting executives across denominations
- Discover new ways to partner with congregations
- Gain new perspectives on your ministry and leadership role by discussing current cases with colleagues from other denominations and faith traditions

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lenge is ministering within a culture without being swallowed up by it. Willimon is extremely critical of the current thinking that pastors have bought into that we must be "extraordinarily nice" and "incredibly warm, affirming, understanding, patient, and popular" (p. 32). Furthermore, it is not our "task to protect [parishioners] from the rigorous demands of discipleship" (p. 68).

The author challenges ministers to work at competence, as a moral matter, and to strive for self-knowledge. Pastors, he says, must be prepared to embrace high moral standards.

The biggest hurdle is finding a way to sustain ministry when it is difficult—and it will inevitably be difficult. To this end, Willimon ably unfolds three primary theological themes that must undergird ministry: community, cross, and new creation.

In my own denomination, I am involved with teaching and forming new ministers. As Willimon addresses a host of basic concerns that I have not so far seen adequately treated anywhere else, I plan to make this book required reading for ministerial students. At the same time, I am encouraging my more experienced colleagues to read it as well.

Arthur Paul Boers
Author, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior*
Waterloo, Ontario

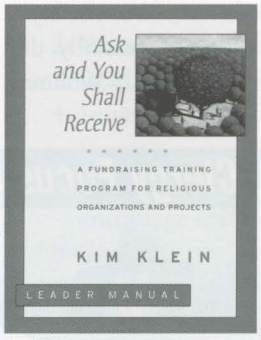
BOOK REVIEW

Ask and You Shall Receive

A FUNDRAISING TRAINING PROGRAM FOR RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND PROJECTS (LEADER'S AND PARTICIPANTS' GUIDES)

Kim Klein
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000

The fundraising world is full of new ideas, but most of the ideas that lead to success are old. Kim Klein covers ground familiar to fundraising veterans in her new training guide for volunteers in religious organizations. Special events, direct mail, telephone canvassing, and face-to-face solicitation all get clear, helpful treatment. With detailed instructions provided for each of 14 sessions, even a fundraising beginner could lead a successful training course, given some knack for leading groups.



Klein's course is refreshing because it is addressed to religious people interested in social change and social justice. The fundraising projects in her examples are quite different from those in most religious fundraising books. They include an ecumenical home finance association, a Jewish group working to stop domestic violence, an interfaith peace organization, a society to promote the use of inclusive language, and a Buddhist retreat center. For churches, synagogues, and other faith-based bodies sympathetic to such causes, Klein's guide will be more useful than those aimed at conservative Christian audiences.

Klein assumes that donors are critical-minded people who need to be persuaded in both mind and heart; that busy fundraising volunteers will appreciate efficient, well-prepared training events; and that the resistance many people feel to certain fundraising techniques deserves a respectful response. These assumptions lend a real-world credibility to her books.

As experienced fundraisers know, the main difficulty religious groups have in raising money is not lack of technique but the failure of volunteers to follow through on the techniques already at their disposal. For this reason, a religious organization seeking to raise a large amount for capital purposes or to markedly increase annual giving is wise to engage a fundraising consultant to recruit, shepherd, and cajole its members through the process. But a group with basically sound fundraising sense that wants only to strengthen and expand its skills can do no better than this fine addition to the Jossey-Bass line of resource books for leaders of nonprofits.

Rev. Dan Hotchkiss
Field Consultant
The Alban Institute

Wood

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ty to discern the sacramental power of ordinary things such as bread, wine, and water? Patterned as our everyday lives are by technological devices, perhaps we need sanctuaries where such devices are marginalized in order to recover our remembrance of what is necessary. How do we encounter Logos amidst a world captivated by the logo?[4]

One of the seminal thinkers about the impact of technology upon culture was Marshall McLuhan, a devout Roman Catholic. One of the deep disappointments in his life was the failure of the Church to grasp the theological significance of electronic technology. As McLuhan put it, "electricity has made angels of us all . . . not angels in the sense of being good or having wings, but freed from flesh, capable of instant transportation anywhere."[5] McLuhan named this kind of life "the discarnate life." The only hope he saw "was through the transformation of mankind by the sacraments of the Church, and the development of the awareness of self through community."[6] Embedded in McLuhan's claim is the understanding that the Table situates us in the material world—it mediates our knowledge of God and one another, and thereby establishes the conditions for our engagement with reality. This engagement is unmistakably incarnational. This is the witness we bring to a world captivated as it is with the discarnate life. ❁

Notes

1. *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 112.
2. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 3.
3. *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic & Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998), p. 335.
4. A wonderful application of Albert Borgmann's analysis to the life of the Church is found in Richard R. Gaillardetz's *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture* (New York: Crossroads, 2000).
5. *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 57.
6. W. Terrance Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding, A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 219ff.

Learn More

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

Technology in Congregations

- Gaillardetz, Richard R. *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture* (New York: Crossroads, 2000). Gaillardetz offers a vision of grace, community, and worship that deserves a serious reading by everyone who feels the impact of contemporary culture and technology. (See Wood, page 14.)
- Larsen, Elena. *Wired Churches, Wired Temples: Taking Congregations and Missions into Cyberspace* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2000). The results of the first survey on the use of the Internet in congregations are examined in this report. The e-mail survey encompassed over 1,300 congregations and it is available online at www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=28.
- Locke, Christopher, Rick Levine, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger. *The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual* (New York: Perseus Press, 2000). Bonnie Perry provocatively applies the Cluetrain Manifesto to congregations (see page 4). The authors of the manifesto are equally provocative about a range of business issues that touch our lives today.
- Wilson, Walter P. *The Internet Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000). "With the Internet, we have the opportunity to reach every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth in the next decade," Wilson writes in this book on the use of the Internet in Christian mission. (See Wind, page 8.)

Congregations Making a Difference

- Aron, Isa. *Becoming a Congregation of Learners: Learning as a Key to Revitalizing Congregational Life* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000). Isa Aron discusses the need for synagogues to become learning congregations (see page 24). In this book she offers stories, ideas, and processes for encouraging lifelong learning by all congregants.
- Miller, Donald E. *Reinventing American Protestantism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Donald Miller, who discusses the role of congregations in the larger community (see page 25), has written a scholarly and sympathetic study of three of the newest Christian movements in the United States. Their decentralized and entrepreneurial modes of founding congregations can be seen as a replacement for the bureaucratic structures of mainline religion.
- National Congregations Study. This study, discussed by Mark Chaves (see page 26), is available for exploration on the Alban Web site at www.alban.org/ncs.asp.

Conflict

- Goodman, Denise W. *Congregational Fitness: Healthy Practices for Layfolk* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 2000). This book explores why congregations are prone to conflict and describes healthy behaviors lay people can practice to manage it.
- Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Image Books, 1994). Nouwen reflects on the story of the prodigal—a story of love, forgiveness, acceptance, and homecoming.
- Rendle, Gil. *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1999). This handbook examines how congregations can live creatively together despite differences of age, race, culture, opinion, gender, theological, or political position.

www.congregationalresources.org

7 Ways to Heal after Church Conflict

Q **Our congregation recently had a big fight, and we need to heal. How can we do that? Feelings are still very strong—people are avoiding coming to services—but some don't want to talk about it anymore.**

A "Church fight" seem like two words that can't possibly go together, so we don't prepare for disagreement. Not surprisingly, we then don't handle it well when it comes and don't heal from it well when it's over. Having worked with many congregations after conflicts, I can suggest some activities that may help. These seven activities are in no particular order; one strategy would be to try one that seems easy and one that seems more difficult.

1. Pray. Begin with 21 days of prayer for someone with whom you are angry. If that doesn't help, repeat as needed in 21-day increments. Recording the prayers and your feelings about them on tape or in a journal can help you to see progress or sticking points.

2. Stay purposefully connected. Attend worship. Believe you can reconnect even with those with whom you most disagree. Find olive branches that you can afford to have rejected. Call people who are missing from worship and encourage them to return. We live in a "divorce" culture where people have a tendency to walk away from problems. Disagreements give the congregation an opportunity to be a practice ground for talking things through, even though it may be uncomfortable.

3. Be honest. Share how you feel—not to lay blame, but to give your feelings a name. "I'm fine" is not the right answer if it is not true.

4. Listen for feelings. Guided listening circles can help, especially with facilitation from your denominational staff or outside consultants. Know that some may need more time or may not feel understood. We need two things before we are ready to move on from a conflict: to feel heard and to feel understood.

5. Allow for differences. Humans heal at different rates, both physically and emotionally. Like the grieving cycle, there is a cycle of forgiveness and healing that people move through in their own way. It can help, in understanding this, to read about forgiveness or healing.

6. Find the lessons. Many congregations feel that a conflict is a waste of resources, time, and energy. In fact, it may be a time of essential learning and practice that will affect the rest of our lives, a time that strengthens faith, and a time that builds up the community.

7. Prepare for next time. Building evaluation into the routine life of the congregation, learning an array of tools for working on issues, and studying and practicing as a community of faith are some ways to take healing to the next step—doing better the next time.

Patricia Carol, a Roman Catholic laywoman, is a field consultant with the Alban Institute. She works particularly in the areas of planning (both for congregations and denominations), health and healing for communities of faith, and helping clergy with assessment of their life and work. Prior to working with Alban, she had more than two decades of experience as a parish minister and middle judicatory executive.

Do you have a question you would like us to answer in this column?

Please send an e-mail to Lisa Kinney at lkinney@alban.org.

Open Discussion, Explore Neighborhood Faith Diversity With Your Congregation ...

"America's New Religious Landscape"

A Special Video and Group Study Guide From PBS' Religion & Ethics Newsweekly *and Alban Institute*

America's new religious landscape is mirrored in virtually every major city in the United States – not only in cities like Los Angeles, New York, and Houston, but even in the heartland. Since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, new immigrants have settled in the U.S. from all over the world, bringing with them their religious traditions – Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian and others. They have also brought a new diversity to American Christianity and Judaism. Today, "we the people" of the United States include people of many religious traditions, all of them challenged to come to terms with the new pluralism that now accompanies America's historic commitment to religious freedom.

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Video and paperback guide available May 2001

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The Alban Institute serves leaders—both ordained and lay—across the denominational spectrum through **consulting services, education events, book and periodical publishing,** and **research**. Our work is supported by membership revenue, grant funding, and the sale of programs, services, and publications.

The Alban Institute **encourages dialogue** with many faith traditions, people of diverse ethnicity, men and women, large and small congregations, and urban and rural congregations. We invite you to join in conversation with us by becoming a member or writing an article for CONGREGATIONS—or both! Please call us at 301-718-4407 or send an e-mail to pwalker@alban.org.

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