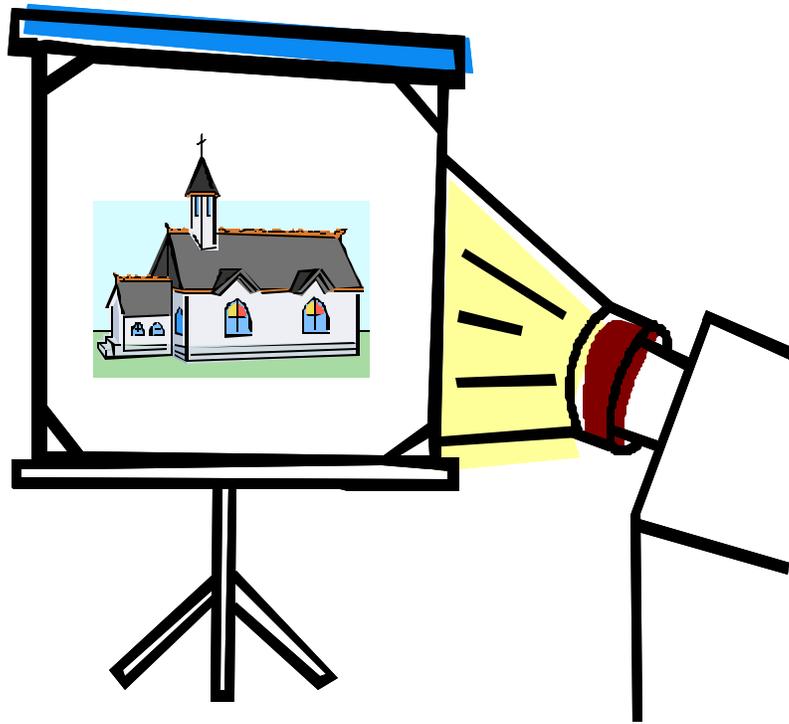


# USING TECHNOLOGY TO STRENGTHEN CHURCH MISSIONS AND MINISTRIES



**Leadership UMC 2003-2004 Session  
May 14, 2004**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE

The importance of maintaining Biblical truth along with denominational doctrine and principles is important to preserving the faith and insuring the effectiveness of the church in the future.

One of the challenges faced by the United Methodist Church today is addressing contemporary issues and the impacts and influences these issues have on church teachings. The following report was generated for the North Georgia Conference Leadership UMC 2003-2004 program. Participants in the program were assigned a topic identified by the United Methodist Church as a subject of special interest needing further evaluation and study. Leadership UMC participants were assigned to groups to research and analyze a selected topic and develop a plan of action to assist the North Georgia Conference, Districts and local churches in responding to these challenges and opportunities.

### REPORT OVERVIEW

The following report addresses a special concern of the traditional church in the use of emerging technologies to strengthen the missions and ministries of the Methodist Church. Technology is changing the way the world communicates and it is important to evaluate how new technologies can be used effectively to share the Gospel in new and powerful ways. The report provides background information of emerging technologies in addition to

specific uses of new communication technology.

The list of technologies is too extensive to describe in totality. Instead, the report provides an overall description of emerging technologies followed by several examples of how technology can be used in church communication, worship, and local and global ministries. Special consideration was provided for churches with vast resources and churches with limited resources. Challenges and recommendations are discussed with respect to technical expertise and financial responsibilities to ensure effective implementation of technology in church mission and ministry programs.

Specific issues highlighted in more detail include the following: Technology and Church Communication (prayer pagers), Technology and Worship (computer aided worship, multimedia worship, global communications), the Church and the Internet, and Integration of the Church and Technology.

### Additional Information

In addition to the specific technologies highlighted in this report, there are numerous other technologies that can be used to strengthen church missions and ministries. These technologies can be as simple as phone trees and email distribution lists to the most advanced scientific and technological advances on the market (e.g., CDs, DVDs and virtual reality). No matter how simple or how advanced, the church (both as a whole

and as individual congregations) should consider utilizing various technologies - not as an alternative to worship - but as a means to enhance worship and reach out to individuals that are not currently connected with church programs.

A more detailed list of technologies is provided in Appendix A.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

A whole new world of technology is emerging in today's church culture. Throughout recorded history, the movement of Christianity has been in direct proportion to the way Christian explorers have managed the connection between religion and technology. A few centuries ago, stained glass, sculptures and paintings told the Gospel to a mostly illiterate population. Then in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the printing press completely revolutionized the way we communicate. The word -- printed and spoken -- was brought front and center in our culture and in our churches. And now, the ever-changing world of technology has emerged as the new method of communication to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to millions of people. Our "new stained glass" is electronic and through the magic of technology, our stained glass can change every week.

We are living in an emergent world that will be much different than the one in which we were born. As the rate of change in the field of technology continues to grow exponentially, the church is faced with an important question. How should we change the structure of our churches to embrace the power of technology? Although technology is becoming more common, its' use is often a foreign concept to many church organizational frameworks. Technology uses are generally spread out across many areas and buried within existing church structures. Few church organizations have the resources to support a full technology ministry and

new ideas for technology use are usually in more of a supporting role than at the forefront of ministry. For example, production technology such as lighting, sound and video typically falls under the responsibility of the music ministry and information technology is usually performed by the church administrative staff instead of managing these functions under independent ministry areas.

At one time, this division of responsibility seemed logical. But technology is now growing beyond what could be called church support. Technology is becoming a ministry in its' own right. Creative technology now provides interactive ways for people to encounter the gospel and connect with the local and global church. Many churches recognize that the technology revolution is profoundly impacting society and the church must quickly and thoughtfully decide how to respond. Used correctly, contemporary technologies such as the Internet, interactive video, and distance learning can do for our century what the printing press did for a previous generation, by allowing us to quickly and effectively reach a larger, more diverse audience with the message.

Decisions about technology uses should be based on the church's mission and specific goals. Media is changing the way the world communicates. It is tempting to let the desire to keep up with the emerging technology culture drive our decisions about introducing this new

tool into the church. But the real question is, “Can new methodologies and technologies help us support the spiritual formation of individuals and congregations?” Can technology help us reach a larger audience and transform lives with the Gospel of Jesus? Whether it is computer-based communication, television and movies, radio and print, or the style in which we worship, the church will continue to be reactive to the cultural trends of technology.

Today we are once again at a historical turning point between religion and

culture. So far, the technology revolution has been introduced to the larger culture outside the church. But gradually churches are rediscovering the power of image and art. Used correctly, technology can be a valuable tool to share the Gospel in new and powerful ways to give individuals a greater opportunity to more fully experience God. The challenge is to introduce this new resource in a way that does not compete with the written Word but rather gives the Word new life.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **TECHNOLOGY USES IN THE CHURCH**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Technology is available in many different forms and the introduction of technology into the ministry field can be challenging. The largest obstacles are most often cost and resources. In many cases, expensive equipment and skilled labor are required to implement technology in church and ministries.

The list is too extensive to describe all of the technologies available and emerging in church culture. Instead, the following sections introduce several unique ideas on how technology is used in church communication, worship, and local and global ministries. These ideas were selected to highlight in more detail because they represented a vast range of technology uses. Some of these technologies require a higher level of technical expertise and financial resources, while others introduce simple and inexpensive ways to use new and effective ministry tools at the local church level.

#### **TECHNOLOGY AND CHURCH COMMUNICATION**

##### **Prayer Pages**

Many churches use electronic mail prayer chains and printed bulletins to share joys and concerns among church members. But imagine knowing for certain that someone prayed for you within a few seconds of their prayer. Would it make a difference in your life

and the lives of those around you? It has made a difference in the lives of people at Gainesville First United Methodist Church in Gainesville, Georgia. In 2002, this church started a powerful ministry with nothing more technical than a pager. They called this ministry "Prayer Pager". People who have faced death, illness, divorce, or some other traumatic experience have shared tremendous testimonies as a result of this unique and innovative ministry.

The use of this prayer technology is simple to implement with minimum financial investment. The person who has a pager (along with written literature) has the opportunity to list their name in the church bulletin along with the pager number. They are also offered the opportunity to remain anonymous. When someone would like to pray for the individual, they simply call the pager number, press 111# and hang-up the phone. Within seconds, the individual's pager alarms either by vibrating or by an audible beep. Instantly they know that someone has said a very special prayer for them. Not only does it bless the person who receives the message but it also reaches out to the people around the individual who know what it means when the pager sounds or vibrates. One church member shared the story of a group experiencing the love and fellowship when a pager alarmed in a Christian Believer class. The message may be simple but the power of God's love far reaching.

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "A mind once expanded by a new idea never returns to its original dimensions." That holds true even with electronic pagers. The meaning of "getting paged" has brought a whole new "dimension" at Gainesville First United Methodist Church

## **TECHNOLOGY AND WORSHIP**

In Mark 16:15, Jesus tells his disciples, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news" to the whole creation. To go into all the world is a mission goal that can be attained with the technological advances now at hand. With the use of a vast range of technologies from multimedia tools in worship to global communications, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is available to a larger and more diverse audience. New technologies allows us to reach many who were otherwise shutout from experiencing Christian fellowship from the physically impaired to those on the distant fringes on the earth .The technological revolution in worship has made the Great Commission Jesus mandated possible. We now are on the threshold of what can become the focal point for blending the spoken Word with technology and its expanding capabilities, to reach the unseen, the unprepared, and the unsaved.

The following sections discuss new and innovative ways that technology can be used in worship and the global mission field.

## **Computer Aided Worship for the Hearing Impaired**

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus talked about the purpose of the Christian community when he said "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them". Participating in worship and Christian fellowship are fundamental to living a fulfilling life within the Christian community. But to those members of the deaf culture and those who are hard of hearing, church and worship can be an isolating and lonely experience. New technologies available to the church can now provide a unique resource to use the written word to augment or replace the spoken word.

Computer technology provides several methods by which the spoken word can be translated to the written word. One idea is the use of a computer during worship to present the spoken words real-time during the service. Because average conversation is approximately 180 to 200 wpm, it would be difficult for the average typist to respond rapidly enough to remain current with the worship service. One United Methodist Church in Evans, Georgia overcame this obstacle when a court stenographer volunteered her skills. Stenographers are trained to type the spoken word at a speed of 240 words per minute. By connecting the stenotype machine to a laptop, computer screen or projector screen, the words of the service were displayed to the hearing impaired with a minimum 1 to 2 second delay. Most stenographers own their own equipment and software so the expense for the church is usually limited to the computer and projector screen and supporting hardware.

The skill of a court stenographer during worship is a unique use of technology that is not available to most churches. While real-time translation is the most effective way to transcribe the spoken word during service, it is certainly not the only method. Technology provides simpler methods to convey the spoken word with the use of computers, word processing software, and projection hardware. Liturgies, scripture, hymns, anthems, prayers, sermons, agendas, outlines, etc. can be entered in advance and displayed real-time as they are spoken. An additional benefit is that the entire proceedings can then be printed for the use of those who cannot take notes while watching the displayed words. The use of computer-aided worship would also be beneficial in translating the spoken word in different languages. As our culture continues to become more diversified, the use of computers to translate bilingual services could become very effective.

A major drawback for computer-assisted worship is that it does require skilled volunteers, computer and projection equipment, and significant preplanning. But when used effectively, computer assisted worship is a great tool to communicate with those who's hearing problems or language barriers isolate them in so many ways.

### **Multimedia Worship**

Multimedia incorporates several elements of communication including visual text, graphics, animation, sound, video, touch, and smell. These elements enhance the total worship experience and give new freedom to those participating in worship. While

multimedia worship may be considered "pioneering" by some and "radical" by others, it is not just a fad. Thousands of churches are already using multimedia to take worship to new levels.

In churches all over the North Georgia Conference, the presence of video projectors and large screens, computer monitors, and presentation software in the worship setting is becoming more commonplace. Although multimedia worship would have once been considered borderline blasphemy, it is becoming as common as stained glass windows in churches of all sizes. Many church services are streamed onto the local television or available through Internet access enabling others to participate in the worship experience. Church web sites often feature archives of church sermons and performances (available in text, streamed audio or video at various access speeds) as well as in-house produced CDs and MP3 music, Christian book reviews, member testimonials, and much more.

While multimedia in ministry is not uncommon, the application into the fabric of worship has not always reached as far or penetrated as deeply as it could. One reason for a limited use of multimedia tools in worship may be that seminary trained church staff are largely taught to communicate with the spoken word and are not as comfortable with the new technologies. In addition, availability, costs, and resources to manage new uses of multimedia technology are often limiting factors. Church staff and volunteers are often overburdened with routine tasks and have minimal knowledge and resources to create compelling computer graphics.

Multimedia in worship is a combination of art, technology, and spirit. Every church has a unique personality. Successful use of multimedia tools are when they are used to complement this personality instead of working against it as technology alone can often do. Provided below are more details in the application of multimedia tools with respect to visual presentations, music, and sensory experiences in worship.

**Videos and Graphics:** Video projectors, computer software and other multimedia devices have been available in family homes since the mid 1990s. The emergence of multimedia in mainstream churches and the growth of digital-video applications and “video ministries” have only fueled the debate over technology’s role in the church. Critics of mega-churches claim, for instance, that these modern churches are often more interested in building membership numbers with brazen marketing and flashy technology than serving the personal worship needs of the congregation.

Media-friendly churches counter by saying that to attract and communicate with today’s 18 to 45 year old attendees, they need to speak their language. Finding modern day parallels for Biblical teachings and wrapping them in visually alluring packages keeps the church relevant for that audience which spurs greater commitment to the mission of the church.

**Music:** Many people assume that the visual display of song lyrics popular with contemporary worship services is a replacement for hymnals. In contrast, hymnals can continue to be used with

visual presentations and used to enhance new multimedia applications. This intermingling of the new and old does require flexibility with those leading worship and those participating. Provided below are many advantages for using visual aids to enhance music worship:

- ◆ Visual display of lyrics allows us to “sing a new song to the Lord” as written in Psalms.
- ◆ Visual display of lyrics and new songs are advantages over chorus books that may be outdated.
- ◆ Visual display of lyrics are not as labor intensive as song sheets that must be prepared weekly and take time and money to print and distribute.
- ◆ Visual display of lyrics “free your hands” during praise and worship services.

**Sensory Worship (Touch and Smell):** In comparing the church to a human body, the apostle Paul wrote, “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where would be the sense of smell?” (1Cor 12:17). Where is our sense of smell when it comes to the aroma of God’s love? Full sensory worship is important to experiencing the essence of God. In the Biblical story of Noah, Noah built an altar and made a burnt offer to God after the ark withstood the flood and landed on dry ground. In Genesis 8:21, the Bible says “And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil

from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done”.

Multimedia worship is not always “high tech”. The simple introduction of touch and smell in worship are often as effective as visual aids to ignite our sensory awareness and worship experience.

### **Purchasing Equipment for Multimedia Worship**

If your church chooses to use multimedia in worship, it is important to make an educated and informed purchase. Determine projection needs for the environment regarding adequate screen size, lighting needs and viewing distances and heights.

Further information about purchasing equipment for multimedia worship including examples of typical projection equipment and estimated costs for small and large church setups is provided in Appendix B.

### **TECHNOLOGY AND GLOBAL MISSIONS**

There are many places in the world where we cannot physically take Christianity, at least not to countries that are closed off to missionaries. The world has always been a dangerous place to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Most religions experience some form of persecution and the followers of Jesus Christ are no exception. With the development of global communication technology, we are more capable of sharing the loving message of our Lord with the larger worldly audience while insuring a safer form of communication.

Informal communication is no replacement for personal communication, but the need for the healing grace of Jesus to be received by the lost is great. Often those with the greatest needs are disconnected from the rest of the world. Possibly 2.7 billion of the world’s people have not heard the Gospel. Approximately ninety percent of these people live in the area that extends from northern Africa to China between the 10 degree and 40 degree lateral lines north of the equator. Fifty-five countries make up the personality of this densely populated harvest field. Most of the world’s poor live in this area and are ravaged by disease, bondage, and hopelessness. This area is recognized as the most dangerous region to travel for Christians. Many of these countries have laws against Christian evangelism and millions of Christians have suffered with no protection or reinforcements.

The need for the true living God is critical for daily living and for eternal salvation. Jesus said in Matthew 24:14, “And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come”. The scripture instructs us to be committed to sharing the good news throughout the world.

Door to door evangelism is no longer an effective mechanism to reaching people in all corners of the world. Global communications and the use of new technology such as the World Wide Web provide an exciting opportunity to reach millions and millions of people. The church has the opportunity to embrace technology for global missions and expedite the command to go forth and make disciples of all men. The life

saving message of Jesus' love can be translated into every common language. With the use of global communications, the Gospel can be transmitted to remote or hostile areas and provide a safer

method for communicating and networking with other Christians.

## CHAPTER 3 THE CHURCH AND THE INTERNET

### INTRODUCTION

- The *Internet* is a decentralized network of computers linked by high-capacity connections capable of transmitting large amounts of data around the globe (or just around the corner) very quickly. The *World Wide Web* is the graphical interface that enables users of the Internet to present data to one another in an easily readable format. A *Web site* is a collection of “pages” made available to other users of the Internet by an individual or organization. People gain access to a Web site by typing the “address” of the site in the “browser” application on their own computer. An example of a Web site address is [www.ngumc.org](http://www.ngumc.org) (the Web site for the North Georgia Conference).

### BENEFITS OF A WEB SITE

A Web site gives a local church global visibility to the entire universe of computer users. It also provides members of the church a valuable tool for strengthening their ties with one another.

For churches, the Web is both a convenient way to organize church activities and keep members informed about meetings, events, committee work, and so on. It is also a way to communicate the mission of the church—both locally and globally.

<p><b><i>A Small Church Establishes an International Prayer Team:</i></b> <a href="http://www.eprayerteam.com">www.eprayerteam.com</a></p>
<p>The <i>Wesleyan Christian Advocate</i> recently published a story (January 2, 2004) about an innovative Web-based prayer group launched by East Highland United Methodist Church in Columbus, GA. This church, where approximately 80 people attend Sunday worship, sponsors a site through which anyone with access to the Internet – regardless of where in the world they may reside – may submit a prayer request to be taken up by the prayer team. The site also has pages that tell how some of the prayers have been answered and invites visitors to become members of the “prayer team” – those who receive the (private) requests and mention them in their prayers. Since the site was launched, the prayer team has grown to include members from as far away as Australia and England or as near as Mexico, Virginia, and Georgia.</p>
<p><i>We are accustomed to thinking about a “church” as a local institution, but the Web enables churches to nurture “virtual communities” of people who build relationships with one another despite the vast geographical distances that separate them physically.</i></p>

### ***Public and Open Versus Private and Secure***

Web sites are an efficient and cost-effective tool for distributing and

collecting information. Within a single Web site there can be pages made available to anyone who visits the site and other pages to which access is limited to a small group of approved users. Public pages are a great way for churches to announce special events or provide a schedule of regular services. Restricted pages rely on user IDs and passwords to allow a limited number of people to share information via secure Web pages that are not accessible to the public at large. These protected pages can be useful to discussion groups or planning committees by helping them to keep in touch with one another between face-to-face meetings.

### ***A Powerful Tool for Reaching Youth and Young Adults***

As a group, youth and young adults are highly comfortable with using computers and the Internet for leisure activities as well as for school and work. Many people—particularly the young—turn to the Web as the first and preferred source of information on what’s going on locally and nationally, be the topic sports, music, or hanging out.

Some churches have developed special sections of their Web site for youth and/or for young adults. One example is [www.mtbethel.org](http://www.mtbethel.org). Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church, located in Marietta, GA, offers a variety of activities for youth both within the church and beyond. The special Web pages for Mt. Bethel youth provides announcements (*continued*) on upcoming events, a list of worship activities, special prayer requests, links to music, etc. It also has private pages for members of the youth group.

Another example is Club M.A.R.K. ([www.stmarkumc.org/clubmark](http://www.stmarkumc.org/clubmark)), which is a social club for young adults sponsored by St. Mark United Methodist Church in Atlanta. This special section of the church’s Web site seeks to help members form meaningful relationships within and beyond the church community. Visitors to the site are invited to sign up for the electronic mailing list, and the site provides announcements about the group’s activities, which range from education, to recreation, to entertainment.

## **BUILDING A CHURCH WEB SITE**

Building a Web site is not a trivial undertaking. The transition from vague idea to fully realized vision comprises three main stages:

- Exploratory research
- Careful planning
- Ongoing maintenance

The first step is to form a “project team” and explore the World Wide Web and familiarize yourself with different types of Web sites. This is a good time to consider the range of activities and applications supported by different types of Web pages and think about what capabilities would be beneficial to your church.

The second phase is careful planning (*and budgeting!*). You do not have to build the most robust site with complicated formatting and coding. However, if you start with the minimal building blocks of Web design, plan your site with an eye to future growth and the addition of more complex, interactive capabilities. A long-term vision of

where your church is headed will allow you to plan a Web site that leaves options open for future enhancements.

The second phase is also the time to identify and compare the different technological options available to the church for supporting and maintaining the Web site. (This is called “hosting,” and more details follow below.)

The third phase is the ongoing maintenance and updating of the Web site. Information about church activities does not automatically find its way to the Web site. Someone has to prepare documents that fit the format of the Web site and upload them to the server where the content of the Web site resides. For example, if the site invites visitors to leave their email addresses or other information and comments, there should be arrangements for collecting this information and responding to it.

Another aspect of Web site maintenance is keeping up with upgrades in technology. Upgrades may be necessary due to changes in the technology or due to the changing needs of the people who use the Web site.

Basically, the goal of “maintenance” is three-fold:

1. To keep things working properly
2. To make things look fresh
3. To make things inviting and comfortable.

*This is just as true for the church Web site as it is for the church building!*

## Tips for Exploring the Web and Other Resources

As the church begins to think about launching a Web site, the project team can start by surfing the Web and visiting different sites.

### A Sampling of Church Web Sites

Some of the church sites listed below provide links to other sites that may generate some creative thinking:

[www.mtbethel.org](http://www.mtbethel.org)

[www.eprayerteam.com](http://www.eprayerteam.com)

[www.stmarkumc.org](http://www.stmarkumc.org)

[www.benhill-umc.com](http://www.benhill-umc.com)

[www.gbgm-umc.org/marybrannan/](http://www.gbgm-umc.org/marybrannan/)

[www.northpoint.org](http://www.northpoint.org)

### Web-based Resources and Guides

As you and other members of the project team explore different church Web sites, the United Methodist Church has two excellent resources that warrant close examination:

[www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) The official Web site of the United Methodist Church provides a wide range of resources, including history, news, and tools for ministry. Of particular interest are the pages on “Web Ministry.” These pages describe the services of United Methodist Communications, which helps local churches, districts, and annual conferences with Web site design and hosting. ***This is the first place to turn for guidance on how to plan and design a Web site that fits the vision and mission of the local church.***

[www.ngumc.org](http://www.ngumc.org) This is the Web site of the North Georgia Conference. Not only

does it provide an example of a well organized site, but the “Communications” section of the site has helpful resources, including a *Draft for Computer and Internet Policies for the Local Church*.

[www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org) The Pew Internet Project provides research and statistics that can help Web designers understand how people use the Internet, thereby helping them to build more effective Web sites.

#### Books

One can take a break from the computer screen and spend time with books that offer tips on Web site design. The “Web Ministry” section of the United Methodist Church’s Web site offers the following recommendations:

Steve Krug, *Don’t Make Me Think*. This book argues that people should be able to navigate a Web site intuitively on their first visit. That is, the layout and labeling of Web pages should be simple and familiar to any user; they should *not* rely on specialized knowledge held by members of a particular group.

Jakob Nielson, *Homepage Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed*. This book identifies 113 rules for building a good Web site and evaluates 50 Web sites in light of these rules. These “lessons learned” can save time and frustration as a church delves into an area of communications technology that is new to many adults.

#### Planning and Budgeting

Once the project team has familiarized itself with the range of possibilities afforded by the Web and Web site

design, the church should review its unique vision and determine how the development and maintenance of a Web site can strengthen the church’s mission. The importance of this step cannot be over-estimated. Small and large organizations of all types—small businesses, large corporations, non-profit organizations, civic groups, etc.—struggle to control the technology rather than be controlled by it. Each church should take time to ensure that its use of a Web site (and any other technology) strengthens the church to fulfill its mission.

Once the church has a firm definition of its’ mission and a clear vision of how the development of a Web site will contribute to that mission, the project team should research the technological applications that will be required to support the site and plan a technology budget that reflects the church’s stewardship needs and goals.

#### REVIEWING THE CHURCH’S VISION AND THE ROLE OF A WEB SITE IN THAT VISION

Once members of the church (or the church’s project team) have familiarized themselves with the range of possibilities available to Web site designers, it’s time for a group of church leaders to review the fundamental mission of the church and to consider how a Web site can be part of this mission. Again, the “Web Ministry” pages of [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) can provide valuable guidance for this process. Here are a few leading questions for initial consideration:

- What is the mission of your church? How can a Web site enhance that mission?
- What are the strengths of your church? What do you offer visitors, and what leads visitors to become members? How will your Web site build on what you already have?
- How can the church's Web site augment the ministry of the church?

### **Choosing the Right Technology**

As the group forms a consensus about how the church's Web site fits into its ministry, the next task is to research technological options and costs. The following tips are adapted from an article entitled, "Choosing Web Technologies," published on [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org):

**Costs:** Determine initial and ongoing costs for hosting a Web site. Remember that the cheapest option may not be the optimal alternative. In today's world, the Web is an essential communication tool. One approach is to compare the anticipated costs of Web hosting with the costs of janitorial services, landscaping, and newsletters.

**Design:** Set a standard for the graphic design and organization of the Web site. These are not superficial issues. The "look and feel" of the Web site gives visitors an immediate impression about the church, its identity, and its vision. The church may have members who have the talent and expertise to meet these standards, or it may decide to hire a Web designer.

**Maintenance:** Each Web site needs a Web master to be in charge of updating content and collecting feedback from visitors. It is important that several

people know how to use the software for keeping the site up to date (so that the church is not dependent on a single individual).

**Hosting:** There are three options for hosting a church Web site:

- 1. In-house Hosting:** This requires either the purchase or lease of a server, hosting software, and high-speed Internet connections. The costs are high and this approach requires close management by an expert. The great advantage is that this approach offers complete control and flexibility in running the site.
- 2. Shared Hosting:** Rather than purchasing or leasing equipment, a church can "rent" space on a shared server. This option works well for many church Web sites which do not usually require large amounts of server space or bandwidth. There may be difficulties if the Web site is upgraded to handle applications that require more memory and bandwidth (e.g., streaming audio or video). The General Board of Global Ministries offers free Web space for United Methodist Churches. The shared-hosting approach offers flexibility at a lower cost than in-house hosting. However, the church must provide or obtain expert management to design and maintain the site.
- 3. Template-based Hosting:** This approach sacrifices flexibility for the sake of ease and convenience. There are companies that develop designs and tools and then make these available to individual congregations, which can easily update content as needed. Tools

often include online calendars, polls, and prayer request systems. One of the greatest advantages of this approach is that the tasks of the Web master can be shared among several individuals with a minimum of training.

### **Final Points to Consider in Designing a Web Site**

Every church Web site should make basic information about the church readily available from the site's "home page." Web designers should also think of ways to make the site inviting, easy to find, and engaging. The goal is to attract visitors who visit the site time and again.

### **Basic Elements of a Church Web Site**

Exploratory research on church Web sites reveals that most provide easy access to basic information about the church, its identity, and its activities. The "home page" of a typical church Web site provides easy links to the following information:

- About Us
- Theological Grounding
- Worship Services and Regularly Scheduled Events
- Special Events
- Directions
- Profiles of Pastors and Staff Members
- Program Descriptions
- Basic Contact Information

### **Registration and Domain Name**

The choice of a domain name (or Web address) is important and deserves careful consideration. The simpler and more intuitive the domain, the better.

Ideally, a user who knows the name of the church should be able to guess the Web address of the church easily. A good domain name will help generate traffic to the site.

United Methodist Communications recommends that churches register their domain name (e.g., [www.ngumc.org](http://www.ngumc.org)) directly with a registrant rather than through a Web hosting company. Two recommended registrants are [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) and [www.dotster.com](http://www.dotster.com). If the church uses free hosting services, like those provided by the General Board of Global Ministries, it is often possible to "mask" the domain name so that it appears as [www.trinityumc.org](http://www.trinityumc.org) rather than [www.gb-gm-umc.org/trinityGA01](http://www.gb-gm-umc.org/trinityGA01).

### **Generating Traffic and Increasing "Stickiness"**

There are two primary ways to increase the success of a Web site, which is typically measured by the absolute number of "hits" to the site (the number of times that the site is accessed) and the frequency with which visitors *return* to the site. The first measure is traffic, the second is "stickiness."

Advertising is the best way to boost traffic, and there are several easy methods of getting the word out about your site:

- Make sure that your church's Web site is listed correctly in the directory of churches at [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) and [www.ngumc.org](http://www.ngumc.org) (or the Web site of the appropriate Annual Conference).
- There are commercial search engines to which a church may submit information about its site. The "Web Ministries" section of [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org)

- has tips on the leading search engines and how to get listed.
- Find out about local search engines that list organizations in your area. A good place to start is the local chamber of commerce and local newspapers.
  - Additional ideas for getting the word out about a church Web site are available at [www.servantevangelism.com](http://www.servantevangelism.com).

The other measure of success is “stickiness.” The most important tip for increasing a site’s stickiness is to make the site *dynamic and interactive*. That is,

- Update the Web site frequently.
- Keep the calendar current
- Provide daily or weekly scripture passages and devotional guides.
- Solicit prayer requests.
- Provide access to records of recent sermons, meetings, and discussions.

The following questions may be useful in building traffic and stickiness into the design of a Web site:

- How can the church attract visitors to the site?
- What do you want people to remember about your church?
- How can the site be organized to make it more effective (more inviting, welcoming, engaging, and “sticky”)? What will bring people back again and again to your Web site?

A Web site need not have sophisticated and robust applications to be dynamic. With simple tools and consistent attention, the team of people that serve as Web master can make regular

additions and changes to the site. Prayer requests, email lists, guest books, and even Web logs or “blogs” can be add an interactive dimension that fosters two-way communication between the Web master(s) and the visitors to the site. The formation of interactive relationships not only creates “stickiness” in a site, but it also creates a “virtual community” that can extend and enrich the church.

## CONCLUSION

Planning a new Web site (or enhancing an existing one) is one of the most important activities that a church can undertake in this age of the “global village.” Throughout this chapter, the people who access a Web site have been referred to as “visitors.” This implies, of course, that the church is the “host.” “Host” is a term of rich meaning in the Christian tradition, and Internet technology offers Christians the opportunity to explore the concept of “hosting” in a new light.

## CHAPTER 4 INTEGRATION OF THE CHURCH AND TECHNOLOGY

Individuals outside the church are increasingly exposed to technology in the home and in the workplace. As more of the population becomes familiar and dependent on technology, it will become increasingly important for the church to evaluate effective uses of technology in worship as well as all other aspects of church communication and outreach.

### **Technology in Church Administration**

Many churches use technology in the business aspects of the church for membership information, printed materials, and receiving and disseminating information electronically. Although technology use in church administrative areas is unnoticed by most of the church population, the use of more advanced tools would likely be expected by those who have embraced the computer era. Churches have also begun to effectively use electronic mail to distribute prayer concerns, church announcements, birth and death announcements, and special events information. Because this method of sharing puts information into the hands of the congregation quickly and evenly, this new communication tool has been accepted and appreciated.

### **Technology in Worship**

Separate from the business aspects of church operations, the future of technology in worship is much more complicated. The struggle within the traditional church is how to integrate technology so that it is an integral part of

worship and not entertainment. Many congregations use multimedia in worship, but it usually is in a support role to the verbal message -- as sermon notes, with song texts, movie clips as illustrations and such. Making the visual element an integral part of worship is a passion for Sally Morgenthaler, a popular speaker and respected author on technology uses in worship. Ms. Morgenthaler says that visual worship is not about cool gadgets or being culturally relevant to a younger generation. It is about giving Christians full-sensory freedom to experience the presence of God. Instead of using video "just to stuff more information into people's heads," she says, "I want to use video to help people experience the person of God through Jesus Christ."

Many people fear that introducing technology into the worship means we are abandoning our traditional liturgy. For many, it is an obstacle to worship, not a part of worship. Technology will never come into full use as a ministry tool until the church learns to overcome this obstacle. It is important that technology is introduced slowly and effectively into the worship atmosphere. The church must learn to make technology blend and flow with worship rather than compete. While quality production is important, telling and experiencing the Gospel stories is where the real power of technology lies. The challenge the church must address is whether or not we can tell the story in a language which the world will see is relevant. The book of Ephesians says:

“Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (4:29). The Scripture does not change and the church must ensure that it tells the same old story even if new and modern tools are used to tell it.

### **Technology and the Emerging Culture**

It is part of our faith process as Christians to engage in holy conversation. More often than not, the conversationalists are fellow Christians in the church or church related environment. Mainstream media is seldom credited with using their vast resources to create a religious forum. But a remarkable event in the guise of a recent mainstream motion picture has had a profound effect on religious and cultural groups throughout the nation and is an excellent example of how technology can be used as an evangelical tool.

On Ash Wednesday 2004, Hollywood actor and director Mel Gibson released the motion picture *The Passion of the Christ*. The film dramatically and graphically captures the last 12 hours of Christ's life on Earth, based on the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The movie has challenged people to engage in discussions about the power and mystery of the Christian faith. Just watch the news, read the papers, listen at the water cooler or in the parking lot, and it's obvious that this movie has had an impact.

The release of the movie has stirred a response in both secular and religious circles unlike any religious related event in the last 100 years. Gibson has made

what is likely to be the most watched Passion play in history and modern technology has permitted this event to reach a far larger audience. Showings were sold out nationwide opening week and religious leaders are urging believers and nonbelievers alike to see the movie and engage in conversation about the experience.

Gibson has said that his purpose in making this movie was to “profoundly change people. The audience has to experience the harsh reality to understand it”. After watching the film, many viewers have said that they experienced the event as real-life bystanders at the crucifixion of Christ. For the first time, viewers were exposed to a full sensory experience of the Gospel not as observers, but as participants. No one who views this film's compelling imagery will ever view the Gospels the same.

Primarily the movie offers opportunities to engage people in important theological discussion. Many religious leaders believe the movie will be one of the greatest evangelistic tools in modern history. Since the release of the movie, churches across the nation are using *The Passion* for evangelism and education. Churches are using study guides, sermons and Sunday School lessons to help those seeking to know the deeper implications of the scripture behind the movie.

The importance of *The Passion* to religion and modern culture is yet to unfold. Only time will reveal if a two hour movie about the crucifixion of Christ will become the Great Awakening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But what is important, is that a 2000 year-old story

told through the voice of modern technology is able to reach millions of people around the world. Regardless of religious or cultural background, *The Passion* has provided one of the best opportunities to help other people investigate God and has opened a new religious dialogue among a new

generation. Now is a good time for all Christians to join in the conversation.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The world of technology and advanced communications has become an intricate part of our culture. The choice for many churches today is how to embrace this powerful instrument to benefit the specific goals of the church. As presented in the previous sections, when used correctly and spiritually, technology can be a valuable tool to share the Gospel in new and powerful ways. When implemented in the church culture without planning and forethought, technology can often be disruptive and distracting.

The relationship between worship and culture is crucial. While early Christians relied on paintings and stained glass to tell the story of Gospel, the stained glass of the modern world is electronic and changing. Modern culture is now able to enjoy a full sensory experience of the Gospel as new technology brings the story to life. Instead of forcing people to abandon their modern world, technology supports reinterpretations of the Gospel to allow people to experience a worship of God that is both part of their culture and an authentic expression of God's presence.

Should your church embrace technology and fast-forward to modern forms of worship? As discussed within this report, the decision to use technology should be based on the church's mission and specific goals. Careful consideration should be given to how new forms of worship and technology uses will be received. Physical and administrative support and financial resources are

important considerations. But most importantly, new technology and the use of multimedia tools in worship should always enhance the storytelling of the Gospel and never compete with the written Word

Change is inevitable. What we must do as teachers of the Word is to reconcile our core, unchanging beliefs with the constantly changing cultural forms of the world. Time will bear witness to whether or not the use technology will grow beyond church support and become a ministry in its own right.

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## APPENDIX A TECHNOLOGY LIST

*This list is by no means inclusive of all the technologies that can be used to strengthen the Church's mission and ministries. This list is only presented as a representation of the group's experiences, ideas and recommendations.*

1. Prayer pagers
2. Satellite/Closed Circuit TV
3. Visual translator (court reporter) for deaf/different languages
4. Internet
  - a. Church websites with links to conference and national sites; provide calendars, activities, worship times, directory, etc.
  - b. Work share – post sermons and best practices online
  - c. Online bible study classes, Sunday school classes, etc.
  - d. Placeholder to post course material, reading assignments, scripture lessons, etc.
  - e. Church chat rooms
  - f. Email distribution lists: prayer requests, family emergencies, birth and death announcements, special events.
5. Newsletters: printed and electronic versions
6. Databases/spreadsheets: keep records of membership, attendance, finances, stewardship campaigns, etc.
7. Automated calling systems: church announcements, events, community emergencies, prayer requests, special services, etc.
8. Cell phone trees
9. Videos and tapes
  - a. Welcome and new member videos/DVDs
  - b. Record and video sermons for distribution to new members, shut-ins, special events, etc.
10. Nursery aid:
  - a. Display unique child identifier number on screen during the service to notify parents.
  - b. Silent (light flashing) pagers provided to parents to notify during worship
11. Multimedia worship:
  - a. Computer assisted worship: sermon notes/outline, scripture readings, song lyrics, etc. displayed on screen
  - b. Overhead projections
  - c. Video clips/images to enhance sermon
  - d. Spoken to written word computer aided translation for hearing impaired or language barriers
12. Virtual reality

**APPENDIX B**  
**TYPICAL PROJECTION SYSTEM AND COST ESTIMATES**

<b>Table 1. Typical Projection System for Large Churches</b>			
2	Hitachi CP-X885 XGA / 3500 ANSI lumens	\$3795 ea	\$7590
2	Chief ceiling mount hardware	\$195 ea	\$390
2	75 ft XGA data cable	\$140 ea	\$280
2	75 ft high res video cable	\$45 ea	\$90
2	75 ft HWR control cable	\$45 ea	\$90
1	1x4 XGA dist amp		\$150
1	1x5 Video dist amp		\$150
2	8x8 Draper Targa motorized screen	\$750 ea	\$1500
1	Multi-media desktop computer		\$1025
1	SundayPlus pres software		\$325
	System design		FREE
	24 / 7 Tech support		FREE
	<u>Shipping / insurance</u>		<u>\$ 330</u>
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$11,920</b>

**APPENDIX B**  
**TYPICAL PROJECTION SYSTEM AND COST ESTIMATES**

<b>Table 2. Typical Projection System for Small Churches</b>	
Hitachi CP-S370 SVGA / 2200 ansi lumens	\$1895
Chief ceiling mount hardware	\$195
50 ft XGA data cable	\$93
50 ft high res video cable	\$30
50 ft HWR control cable	\$30
8x8 Draper Luma manual screen	\$350
Multi-media desktop computer	\$1025
SundayPlus pres software	\$325
System design	FREE
24 / 7 Tech support	FREE
Shipping / insurance	\$140
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4083</b>

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