ISSUES
IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Is **TECH NOLOGY** Essential in Teaching the **Faith?**

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Is Technology Essential in Teaching the Faith?

reflections

"This is *not* your grandfather's Concordia!" I've thought that several times in recent months. But changes in this institution of Lutheran Christian higher education are not about theology or faith or historic commitment of service to the church and world. They are about practice and pedagogy, delivery systems and communication tools. They are scary and exciting, simple and complex, transactional and transformational.

Consider the following:

· During our August pre-year faculty and staff seminar, Andrew Swenson, our new Director of Marketing, led the faculty in a discussion of social media titled "A World of Ends." Everyone paid rapt attention.

· On August 22, 2010, I inducted Ms. Angie Wassenmiller as our Director of Instructional Technology and E-Learning.

· Last summer we installed 207 new computers in 12 student computer labs across campus.

· Soon we will launch a new website that will allow the world to connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and a blog.

· Our admission team and coaches are equipped with mobile phones that they use as much, if not more, for texting than they do for calling because students being recruited would rather text than talk.

· We are in the process of developing our first two **fully** on-line master's degree programs.

· One hundred percent of our undergraduate and graduate classes have an on-line component imbedded within them.

· In the past year, we offered 47 undergraduate and 86 graduate courses to our students fully on-line.

· I divide my communication efforts among email, Facebook, text messages, and the old-fashioned communication tools of telephone and letter.

· Earlier this year the editorial staff made the decision that this will be the last hardcopy edition of *Issues in Christian Education*.

Are you weary of technology yet? Some days I am! There seems to be no end to the technological tools available to persons all around the world. This edition of *Issues* asks and answers some significant, if not profound, questions about the use, the impact, the blessing, and the challenges of technology in teaching the Christian faith.

Thank you for your loyal readership and support of forty-four years of hardcopy journals. I hope and pray that this edition and future electronic editions of *Issues* will be a blessing to you as you proclaim, teach and live the Good News of Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the world!
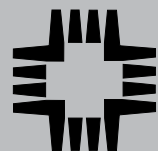
Brian L. Friedrich, President

editorials

Musings on Media

Any technology which allows a pastor to speak to 50,000 unbelievers and tell them about the Savior's story of salvation is a good thing. Any technology which allows 100,000 people to push a button or twist a dial and turn off that same message is a humbling thing. Any technology which allows the Lord to stop a suicide in progress, which brings hope to a Nigerian congregation which has 150 orphans, which brings comfort to a family who has just lost their teen-aged son, which creates a Christian congregation in a village high in the Andes is a good thing, a Godly thing, a Holy Spirit kind of thing.

As Speaker on the 80-year-old Lutheran Hour, the last eight years have taught me those lessons and more. Seeing simple sermons speaking to an unseen audience through radio, satellite, Internet, emails, twitters, mass mailings, CDs, DVDs, MySpace, Ipods and Braille has also forced me to form some opinions on media and technology. More specifically, I've come to some conclusions as to what these modern gifts from God can do and what they can't do.

For example, contrary to what many enthusiastic TV and radio preachers may intimate, technology is not a new means of grace. In these latter days, God has not decided to transform the microchip and circuit board into visible elements for the 21st century. Yes, these "ministries" post grand numbers in attendance and money raised, but a slick preacher's smooth, snake-oil presentation promoting his own newly revealed un-gospel is a sad and sorry substitute for sharing the Savior's story of salvation with sinners. Even if there had been no Great Commission, these ministries which have deserted sound doctrine are reason enough for the Word-and-Sacrament

church to embrace and use technology. We dare not entrust the souls of people to those whose own revelation stops them from saying, "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

But the Lord Jesus did give the Great Commission, and He has asked us to reach the world. It is here, in proclamation, that media and technology can contribute. They can scatter seeds across the Lord's fields. They can amplify His voice so it can be heard in places where the Gospel cannot normally, regularly, or financially be shared. When a government, a family, or a human heart tries to banish the Savior, media and technology can find ways, creative ways, unique ways to circumvent those barriers and tell of the crucified and risen Christ. In places, and there still are such places, which are so small and remote as to preclude a face-to-face presentation of the Gospel, technology can deliver a media message. Even more, the anonymity of the person delivering the message and the hearer's complete control of the presentation often enable that message to be delivered in an unthreatening manner. Which, being interpreted, means media and technology can say something to a wandering or wayward young person that a concerned parent cannot.

These thoughts have been my reality as I have regularly spoken to a congregation larger than is gathered at all of the Missouri Synod churches on Sunday. It has meant the Savior is being shared with an audience composed of the most educated theologians, the most hardened criminals and a four-year-old who is sick in bed with the flu. Technology has allowed me to speak of Jesus' sacrifice to a soldier far away from home, a

family snowed in at home and a golden-ager who is spending his first week in a nursing home. It has given me opportunity to address a frightened family sitting in a hospital emergency room, a fisherman sitting in his boat and a college student sitting in his dorm cramming for a final. It has meant taking the Christ to a truck driver headed cross-country and the ambulance driver making a one-mile run. Media and technology have made it possible for me to preach to people getting ready for church, people coming home from church and folks who have never been inside a church.

Speaking on The Lutheran Hour is never seeing your audience, and not knowing who's listening, who's fallen asleep, and who's about to turn to another station. Even so, it's believing that the Holy Spirit will take that message and accomplish His purposes. Media and technology have allowed me to speak to pastors of all denominations who need to have someone share the Savior with them. Most importantly, every week technology and media have allowed me to reach out to those who are hearing the Gospel for the very first time and those who are hearing it for the very last time. They have allowed me to go up to strangers and say, "Hello, I'd like to introduce you to Jesus. Let me tell you about Him and how your life is incomplete and your eternity insecure without Him." When people have asked, "Sir, we would see Jesus," media and technology have allowed me to make sure they really do get to see the real Redeemer.

Yes, media and technology have allowed these things to happen. These things are not everything, but they are something; they are something that God can use to bring Christ to the nations and to our neighbors, too.

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Technology Should Get Out of the Way

Perhaps I am merely revealing the bias of my generation—or of my profession—but I take technology for granted. I consider it a foregone conclusion that teachers should be versed in modern technology. Knowing what the Internet, Google search, social networks, and smart phones *mean* for research and for culture is just part of being "with it." Effective use of computers is simply part of professionalism today.

Nevertheless, I believe that all too often technology gets in the way.

In the last 50 years, computers have grown approximately 6,000 times faster. They have increased a million times in capacity. They have shrunk to a thousandth of their former size. They use a 13th of the power and are a 50th of the price. Pseudo-scientifically speaking, they are 3,900,000,000,000,000 times better.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to wrap one's mind around improvement at that pace. Now computers are so small that their inner workings are completely hidden from users; their behavior is esoteric. And they have grown in power more quickly than we can imagine what might be possible with them. As a result, they are more than a little magical.

Technology today is thickly surrounded with the aura of magic; it lends itself to mythologizing. We invent superstitious reasons for why computers behave the way they do. And we can be dazzled by their display of omniscience or catchy graphics.

As a result, "Technology" is one of those words that carries more connotation than denotation—a buzz word. It enjoys more privilege than responsibility. So speakers and authors invoking "Technology" can make boundless claims. They can conjure both fantastic and saturnine outcomes for students and schools.

We should all be guarded by healthy incredulity when predictions are made about technology.

My concern is not irresponsible rhetoric, however, but the ability of computer graphics, massive databases, and tiny smart phones to dazzle. Because it is so magical, even well-meaning technology has a tendency to draw attention to itself—and to steal attention from a task, or from information, or from an educational objective.

Instead of impressing and distracting, technology should mimic typography. Robert Bringhurst writes in *The Elements of Typographic Style* that:

"In order to be read, [typography] must relinquish the attention it has drawn. Typography with anything to say therefore aspires to a kind of statuesque transparency."

Technology, too, should aspire to transparency. The best programs and devices *disappear* from users' attention as they focus on the problem or information at hand. But technology becomes visible, gets in the way, and steals focus when it fails and when it is misused.

One way that technology steals attention is by failing. A projector that won't connect, a network outage, lost emails, and unresponsive programs are all failures. *These are not the teacher's failures, but rather the system's failures.* Better systems are not always available; but if they are, your school needs to get them. Technology that fails in the classroom is like a Pyrrhic victory: the costs outweigh the benefits.

Technology also steals attention when it is misused. In fact, thanks to its magical nature, it tempts misuse in three different ways:

1. When technology affords a new way of solving a familiar problem, it can be tempting to focus on the *technique*, on the particular *style* of the technological solution than on the problem;
2. The 'dazzle' of technology is a temptation for marketers and sellers of new products, since it is much easier to come by rather than having real value;

3. Worst of all, attractive graphics and other gimmicks can be used to gloss over an impoverished presentation. Instead, technology should be used like typography:
1. Utilize it to help to bring attention to the subject or content or activity;
2. Look for products or ways of using them that relinquish attention and allow the utility to "disappear" or to take a back seat in your classrooms;
3. Look for products or ways of using them that fall in line with—and support—your educational objectives rather than ones that seem to bring their own objectives.

Teachers, pastors, DCEs, lay leaders, I am confident you are already very mindful of where attention is given in your classes. Administrators who are making purchasing decisions, I would encourage you to look past the general hype, the marketing, and lists of features. Be sure you know how a product will be used in your schools and what infrastructure is needed to ensure it won't fail in the classroom. And, developers, be wary of the temptation to dazzle. Products that only dazzle are, to paraphrase the book of Jude, "waterless clouds and wandering stars."

Don't let technology get in the way.

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Technology, Only the Means in the Educational Mission

Ten years ago, Concordia University, Nebraska upgraded the computer systems for faculty from desktops to laptops. As this upgrade took place, I remember a colleague from the department saying this as he held up a piece of chalk: "This is my technology." Now, the use of laptops with video projectors has become second-nature to me. I think about my colleague's remark as the current edition of *Issues in Christian Education* addresses technology, teaching and student learning.

In some ways, my approach to teaching has involved multiple dimensions: making transparencies for the overheard projector; incorporating a discussion board within WebCT for an on-campus class; teaching an on-line class with the usual incorporation of discussion boards, chat rooms and assignments in "drop boxes" within WebCT; and now, recently, adding video streaming lectures in Blackboard, making the course asynchronous, available to the students, 24/7. In the last few weeks, I threw away some of the remaining transparencies from my courses, having "converted" the transparencies to scanned documents within PowerPoint.

Which leads me to a question involving technology in the classroom: "How do you make a point in your lectures using PowerPoint without having your lectures become pointless?" The issue for me is not about PowerPoint, but the role of technology such as PowerPoint, SmartBoard, and a host of other gadgets and software available to instructors in teaching. Only yesterday, an announcement was sent around campus, via email of course, about how student response systems known as "Clickers" can engage students in courses that have a high number of students enrolled. Once again, I, as an instructor, am faced with a technological possibility while, at the same time, needing to decide if such technology has educational value in the classroom.

In my opinion, the underlying foundation of the current edition of *Issues in Christian Education* speaks to the instructor's philosophy of education. The technology that instructors incorporate in their teaching is only the means to serving each instructor's educational philosophy. So, when I am presented with the possibility of incorporating "Clickers" in the classroom, I have to revisit my philosophy of education and from that, decide if that type of technology will serve my educational philosophy. Otherwise, I could be so busy trying to be current with the latest technology that I forget why I am using the latest technology. In that case, technology becomes the driver of the course, shaping course content, and dictating how the course content will be managed (and manipulated).

If my educational philosophy reflects God's love in Jesus Christ, then I, by the power of the Holy Spirit, reflect Christ in my teaching both in the classroom and in on-line instruction. Technology serves as a means to convey the presence of God's love in Jesus Christ both in face-to-face learning and on-line instruction. Technology can serve the instructor's educational philosophy so that the instructor can witness in the classroom and on-line the "aha" moments when students have mastered a concept or demonstrated comprehension of a particular theme.

By the end of the semester, I will be transparency-free from my courses. And I am sure that by the end of the semester, I will have received more campus announcements on how technology can foster learning in both face-to-face learning as well as on-line instruction. Before I make the purchase of an electronic writing pad for my classroom, I need to ask myself this question: "How will the electronic writing pad serve as a means to accomplish my philosophy of education?" If I pick up a black marker and begin writing on a white board, I will need to ask the same question.

Teaching and learning involve human interaction. For instructors, the question is: "To what degree, if any, will technology play a role in teaching and learning?" Technology is only the means in the educational mission, not the end of the educational mission. If technology is the end of the educational mission, technology may very well diminish the quality of the educational mission of schools from kindergarten to graduate school.

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Richard Richter

Why is the Question, "What is the Role of Technology in Faith Formation?" Important?

Introduction

While technology has become a major part of our daily lives, we may not like it and complain that it is impersonal, cold and dehumanizing. Some feel intimidated, afraid that something may break because the wrong button was pushed. Those of us of the older generation often feel that technology has taken over too much of our lives, and that we no longer have control. One of my favorite YouTube videos tells the story of a medieval monk busily trying to figure out how to operate a new technology, the book. He frantically calls for tech support. The technician carefully and patiently shows the anxious monk how to turn a page and open and close the book. His prior experience with the printed word was the scroll, and this new technology was frustrating and confusing. That same monk probably wondered how God's Word could ever be taught with this new technology.

New technologies present us not only with challenges but also with amazing opportunities. Marshal McLuhan in the late 60s said that technology served as extensions of ourselves (Kappelman, 2002). With the invention of the wheel, our legs were given the capacity to travel longer distances. Electronic media, TV, radio and film have given our eyes and ears the capacity to see and hear events not only in the present but also the past from anywhere in the world. Computer technology has given our brains the capacity to solve problems and access information at incredible speeds. Said in another way, technologies are tools given to us by God. As teachers of the faith these are tools to be used for fostering faith formation in our students. In this article I will explore ways that we can build a "tool box" for teachers. Often the first inclination is to use a particular technology because it's new or flashy. I often tell in-service teachers that the latest, fanciest technology may not always be the best tool for the job. Students

have many different learning styles, with one method of teaching not working well with some students but not all. The selection process is important.

Digital Natives vs. Digital Immigrants

Those students who have been brought up in today's digital culture are referred to as digital natives. Digital Natives are characterized as: Web-based who have less fear of failure, seek instant gratification, and therefore often are impatient. They tend to be nonlinear learners and are more adept at multitasking. They are less textual and prefer to learn by using other modalities (especially, visual). They are creative, prefer active involvement, and are very expressive, egocentric, social and less structured. They prefer electronic environments and have electronic friends often sharing a common language. Digital Natives see technology as a need and have a sense of entitlement (NCAECT, 2007).

Digital Immigrants, on the other hand, have not grown up with digital technologies and are characterized as being linear thinkers/learners. They prefer face-to-face social interactions with others, desire to read text on paper rather than on a computer screen, and are not very good at multitasking. Digital Immigrants are often intimidated by the complexity of technology and often feel a lack of control.

The difference it seems is that teaching Digital Natives has much to do with learning style. As Digital Immigrants we tend to value teaching methods that worked for us as students. We prefer to read from a book rather than a computer screen, to print content on a computer screen to paper, and to write with a pen and pencil rather than type on a keyboard. We prefer to socialize and communicate with others face-to-face and cannot understand how values can be communicated in other contexts or modes. We often wonder how students can possibly learn anything when they are listening to music on their iPod, playing a game on their Play Station, watching TV and studying all at the same time. Marc Prensky writes: "Digital

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Immigrant teachers assume that learners are the same as they have always been, and that the same methods that worked for the teachers when they were students will work for their students now. But that assumption is no longer valid.

"Today's learners are different. 'See you on Webkins.com,' said a kindergarten student recently at lunchtime. (Webkins are stuffed animals with a related interactive web site.) 'Every time I go to school I have to power down,' complains a high school student. Is it that Digital Natives can't pay attention, or that they choose not to? Often from the Natives' point of view, their Digital Immigrant instructors make their education not worth paying attention to, compared to everything else they experience—and then they blame the students for not paying attention!" (Prensky, 2001)

As teachers of the faith, we are presenting the timeless truths of Law and Gospel to our students. The issue here is not the content of our message to students but the way in which we convey it to learners of the 21st century. The stories, traditions, values and truths of God's message have not changed. The challenge is how to *engage* today's students.

The Challenges

Some questions which face teachers of the faith are: How can I keep up? (My students know more about this than I do. I don't want to look foolish.) Are there good resources out there? How can I know what works well and what doesn't?

Technology is moving at a rapid pace; it seems that as soon as we figure out how to do something, it changes. Technology introduced today will most likely be replaced by newer, better technology in 18 months. This means that a teacher not only needs to replace old technology but also needs to constantly update technology skills.

One of the best ways to keep up is to communicate with other teachers. This means attending conferences, sharing ideas and challenges with your colleagues and taking advantage of many online resources. Listen to your students, know what they're watching on TV, what resources they like to use on the Internet. The Digital Natives in our classroom can be great teachers. It's amazing how quickly they can pick up and explore new technologies. One resource I have found to be useful are Wikis. A Wiki is an Internet tool that allows people with common interests to contribute and use

resources and teaching ideas with other teachers. They are very easy to use, and many of them are free.

One that I've found to be very helpful is "Technology in Lutheran Schools": http:// techls.ning.com/. A goal of TECHLS is to extend conversations about technology in education to as many teachers, coordinators, and decision-makers as possible. "The Lutheran School Portal" is another useful resource for Lutheran teachers. "The Lutheran School Portal" serves more than 900 Lutheran schools with over 15,000 registered users. It provides users with access to a listing of web sites for classroom use, shared documents, sample lessons and more to help the classroom teacher integrate technology into the instructional process. Search engines such as Google and Bing can be useful tools to teachers by presenting ideas and resources for teaching. The greatest challenge is to determine what is good and what is not so good.

How do I engage my students? It seems as if their attention span is nonexistent. Technology is certainly amazing—it's fast, almost immediate. The amount of information available throughout the

Internet is staggering. A white paper published by Digital Universe (http:// www.emc.com/digital_universe) estimates and forecasts the total quantity of digital information created, captured and replicated worldwide. It is measured in exabytes (one exabyte=1 billion gigabytes) and is forecast to grow rapidly, reaching 1,800 exabytes by 2011. (IDC, 2010) This information is dynamic.

The Digital Native thrives on the rapid pace of visual and aural information; he/she can process and manipulate information more quickly than Digital Immigrants. Our challenge as teachers is to teach these students how to be critical consumers of the vast amount of digital information. Teaching styles must be modified by "chunking" information in shorter lessons. Digital Natives will respond more positively to active learning techniques, such as role playing and simulations or educational games, than to traditional lecture.

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and a multitude of other communication sites are commonly used by Digital Natives to stay in touch with friends and to express their feelings and opinions. Some social media sites are targeting students at very young ages. This challenges teachers to teach Digital Natives how to use these tools safely.

The Opportunities

Technology in our culture today has become more than a luxury. In many cases it has become a necessity. We have come to rely on cell phones, for example, to stay in contact with our family and friends. Many of us rely on the Internet to do our shopping, make decisions and keep up with what's happening in the world. Many feel this trend will continue. Print-based materials such as books and newspapers will continue to modify their formats to be delivered over the Internet.

As teachers of the faith, we now have the opportunity to tell the stories of salvation to our students in new and engaging ways. The cost of technology continues to drop every year. Computers costing over $2,000 five
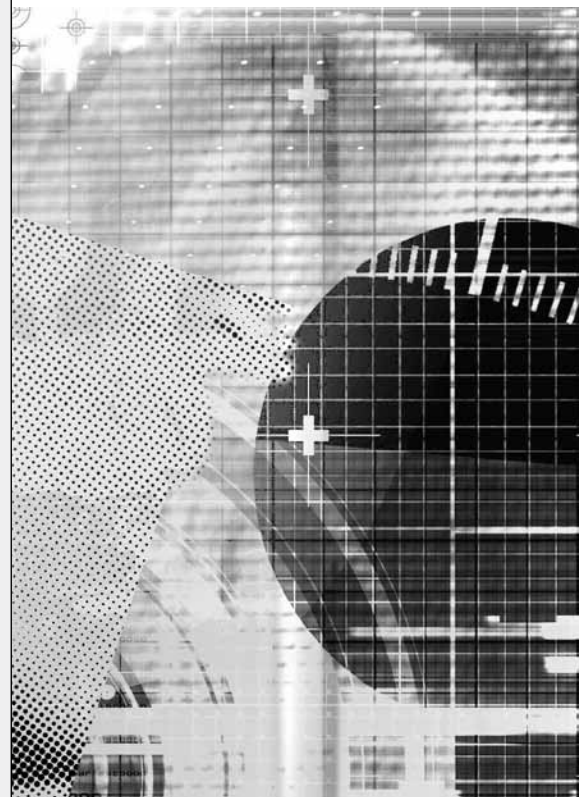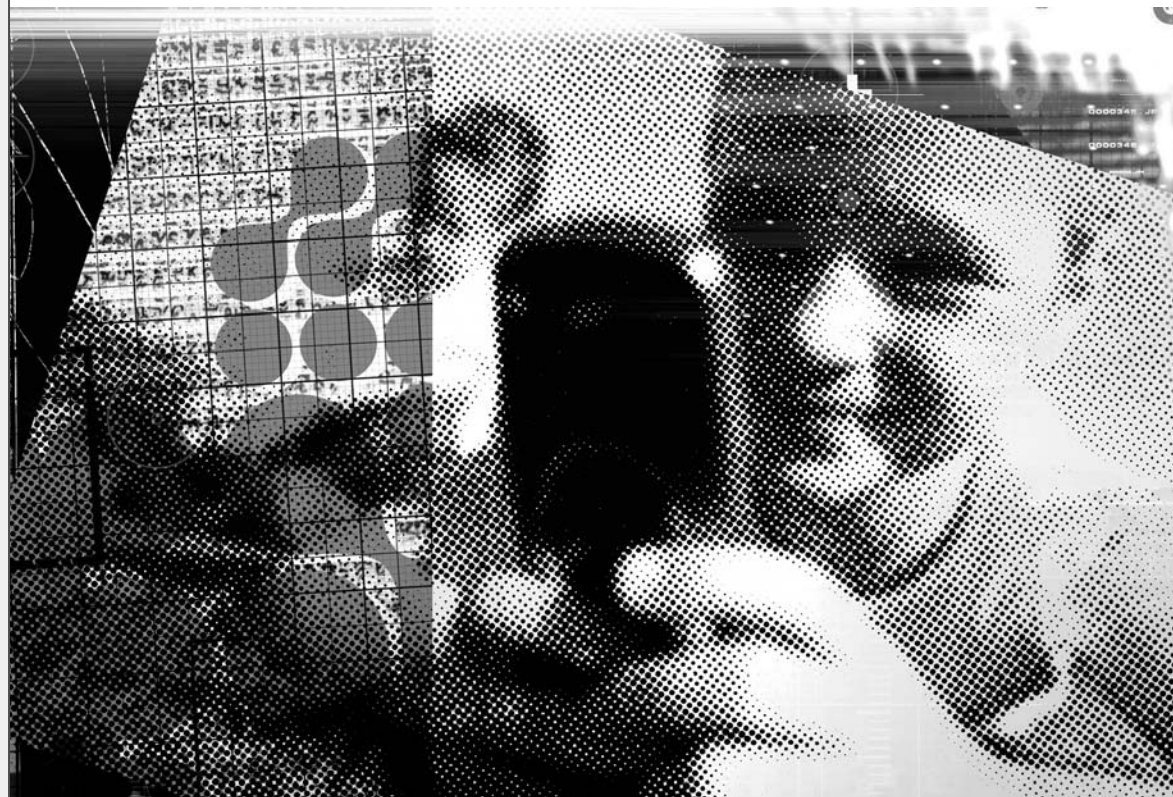
years ago are now available for $300. Internet connectivity has become a necessary utility in our society. Laptop computers, interactive white boards and video projectors have become affordable for even the smallest schools. Digital cameras are routinely built into most cell phones. Internet access has become more affordable and available in most communities.

These technology resources are opportunities to engage students in new and engaging ways. Interactive whiteboards, also called SmartBoards, have become a very popular means of delivering instruction. The board uses a video projector to project an image on the whiteboard. Special markers allow the teacher or students to use "electronic ink" to draw images on the board and to manipulate them. Interactive white boards are great tools to demonstrate relationships between images, words and numbers. Many teachers use the interactive white board like a chalk board. Class notes and lessons can be saved on the computer and then retrieved for reviews. Digital photographs, maps and movies can be projected on the board allowing students to draw overlays and understand visual relationships. Some boards include Student Response Devices (clickers) allowing students to enter answers to multiple choice quizzes projected onto the board, giving students and teacher instant feedback on student learning. This tool gives teachers a way to engage students in stories, to draw them in through active participation.

Digital Natives are visual learners; they have been exposed to countless visuals from birth. Means of visual expression for them have gone beyond crayons and markers to digital photo and video cameras. As teachers we need to show students how to communicate effectively with visuals, we need to teach them the elements of a visual language.

A digital story is a short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds. Digital storytelling is a way to allow students to express their faith to others in a way that is meaningful to them. Many

tools such as Animoto, Photo Story and Go Animate are available free on the Internet. These tools and many others give students the opportunity to tell visual stories from images. Students can express their feelings and ideas in engaging and creative ways. Teachers can use these tools to teach students how to organize their thoughts into a medium that is meaningful to the Digital Native. Teachers have the opportunity to teach students how to create a storyboard, compose scripts and learn valuable composition skills.

Podcasting is another great way to engage Digital Natives in any subject matter. Students research a topic, then develop a script that is recorded on the computer. (Audacity, a free software program works great for this.) After the recording has been edited, it's placed on the school's web server to be shared with others in the class or the school community. In the "old days" students' work, papers, worksheets, projects were usually shared only with teachers, students and parents. Now, the potential exists for students' work to be shared with a much wider audience. Students have a greater incentive to create with media that they know will be shared with their peers and family.

Computer technology allows teachers to encourage collaboration among students with tools such as Google Does, Wiki's and blogs. The Internet now allows us the opportunity to place documents, photographs and videos on shared workspaces, often referred to as the "cloud," for others to collaborate. Group projects in the classroom become easier to manage and encourage sharing and cooperation. Cloud computing and Web 2.0 applications have the potential to bring the classroom home, encouraging parents to take a more active role in their students' education. Learning now can become accessible to students anytime, anywhere. Many K-12 schools are using course management software such as Moodle and Blackboard to deliver learning to students at home. Home-schooled students now have the capability to collaborate with other students and access materials and lessons from around the world.

Conclusions

I believe that the 21st century Digital Natives learn differently than we Digital Immigrants. I believe that they can achieve desired learning outcomes if we as teachers can successful adapt our teaching strategies to meet their learning style. I would suggest:

· Collaborate with other teachers, share ideas, successes and failures. Use the Internet and social media positively.
· Make biblical stories come alive by using multi-media materials.
· Give students an opportunity to express their faith in various ways using images and video. Allow them to create stories that reflect their understanding of how God works in their lives.
· Present material in shorter lessons, intersperse other activities between "lecture" periods, allow students to respond.
· Encourage collaboration among students; group work gives them an opportunity to express their faith to others.
· Encourage students to reflect on their own experiences and feelings on how God works in their lives. Technology and the Internet expose them to a diverse and sometimes frightening world; allow them to express their opinions and ideas.

Although technology may seem to be impersonal, intimidating and complex to those of us who are Digital Immigrants, I believe that it is a gift given to us by God to teach and spread His Word. Even though the medium may change (remember the monk referred to in the beginning of this article), God's Word is unchanging. Technology presents us with opportunities to bring the world into our classrooms. With technology tools like Skype, we can communicate with Christian communities all around the world.

As teachers and parents we must also be aware of the risks when we expose students to the Internet. As parents and teachers we have the responsibility of teaching students to be intelligent consumers of technology. The Internet has the power to expose us to a great amount of information, some of which is good and some bad. We will need to help our students to make intelligent and

critical decisions when consuming media and technology. We need to help them view this new media through the lens of their faith.

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Dr. Renea Gernant

"Is It OK To Be a Technology Illiterate Teacher of the Faith?"

"YES!"
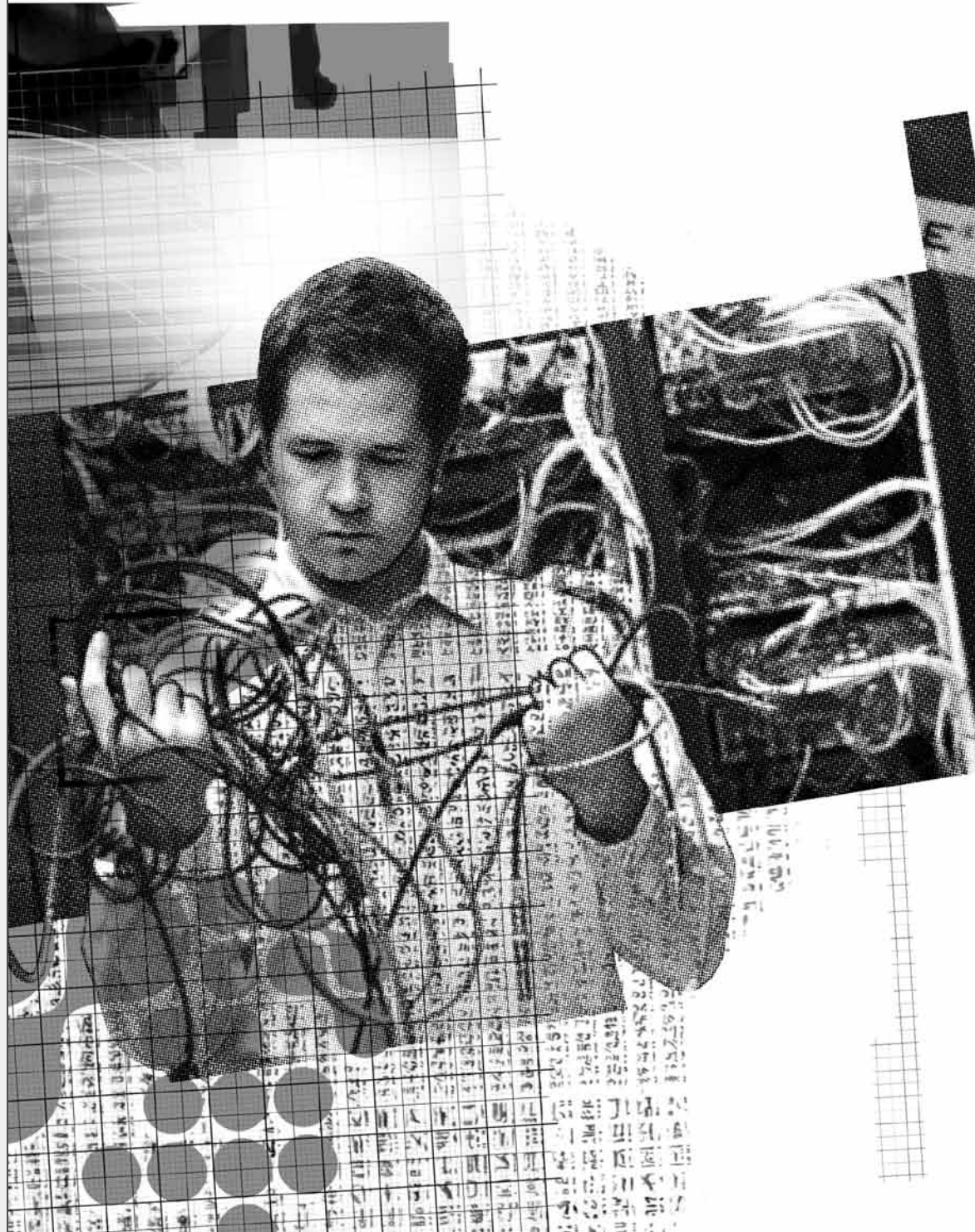
Of course. Of course it is okay to be a teacher of the faith doing it the old-fashioned way without technology. Jesus managed to do just fine without a computer or the Internet. And frankly, there are hundreds of incredible teachers of the faith who are sharing the Gospel message using the most basic of tools: through the Word, the waters of baptism and in communion with our brothers and sisters. There are great teachers without technology who meet students where they are, guide them on a journey of which they are not even aware, and prepare them for that calling which God has already seen for them.

Yet, there is far more to this discussion, particularly if one asks a related and more debatable question: Is it okay for a teacher of the faith to reject technology? And again, the answer is "yes." Yes, teachers of the faith can reject technology and choose to value people over machines.

Technology's Place

Undoubtedly, technology has value and can be a useful tool. It has almost become common wisdom that to function in society one needs to know technology. Instructional technologist, Angela Wassenmiller, Concordia University, Nebraska, states:

> I often hear the argument that teaching and learning can be effective without technology, and many are surprised to learn that I (an instructional technologist) am in complete agreement. It would be illogical, given research and the history of education, to argue that it is impossible to teach or learn without digital technologies. I do, however, ask these naysayers to join me in a hypothetical situation in which we each have our own school. In their school, they can teach without technology.

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In mine, I will infuse it throughout the curriculum and ensure that my students develop digital literacy and are comfortable with new technologies. Now, the students graduate from our respective schools and start interviewing for jobs. On average, whose do you think will be most successful? Educators have a responsibility to prepare students to live and work successfully in the 21st century, not the Industrial Age (Wassenmiller, 2010, Sept 28).

Wassenmiller is not alone in her inclination to integrate technology throughout the curriculum and defend its usefulness. The question for this article series developed out of the Bill Cochran's March 2009 *Ministry Technology Mentor Newsletter*. In his article, Cochran asked and answered the title question for this article with a "**No**," arguing it is not okay to be technologically illiterate. He stated, "In my judgment, I think becoming technologically literate is an important goal, especially if we, as teachers, are to 'design and develop digital age learning experiences and assessments for our students. …in my case, I figured it was my responsibility to become properly trained so that I could integrate technology with my curriculum successfully'."

On many of these points, I actually agree. I believe that well-educated people, Christians in all walks of life, and teachers of any sort need to know and understand the world and the culture in which we live. We should know about the technologies available to us, and if we are going to use technology, we should use it well. And I won't argue that there are no uses for technology in the hands of Christian educators specifically.

Last spring, the Luther Seminary publication, *Story*, asked the question, "Would Martin Luther Tweet?" (referencing the social networking tool Twitter) and followed up with the possibility that Luther would have blogged the 95 Theses, reported his Facebook status and edited the indulgences page on *Wikipedia*. The author, Shelley Cunningham, noted that Lutherans

from the Reformation through today have used technology to share the Good News, whether using movable type or electronic transmission. She has a point.

The church and Christian educators can benefit from the tools of technology. As Cunningham argues, people find community and spiritual support in a myriad of mediated forums, and there are many ways in which teachers of the faith can and should use media for outreach within and without the Christian community.

Technology offers tools of which many teachers of previous generations would never have imagined. Technology offers tools that I had not dreamed of 20 years ago. I use technologies in all my classes from the now mundane use of MSWord PowerPoint (despite the terrible public speaking habits it supports) to streaming video to interactive assessments to research databases. I teach on-line and love it. I keep up with current and former students via Facebook and LinkedIn, and I believe in the use of new media for marketing our programs. I am a technology-based teacher and learner.

Literacy vs. Dependency

However, just because we have tools, doesn't mean it's always appropriate to use them. Too often, educators equate "literacy" with an obsessive use and/or dependency on technology as if the technology in and of itself is of value. Wassenmiller notes, "The goal should not be for students to use technology for each and every lesson, just as you would not use project-based learning or worksheets for every lesson …. A technology savvy teacher could very easily lean toward integrating technology into every lesson. As educators, we should not be so "anti-x" or "pro-y" that we fail to (1) grow as learners ourselves, and (2) provide a well-rounded learning experience for our students."

Wassenmiller states, "Good teaching happens when students are motivated, engaged, and meet learning goals. Technology can assist in all of these areas. However, we must remember that it is not the technology itself, but the way that it

is used, which enhances learning. Merely having technology in the classroom, or using it in an ineffective way, is not beneficial to the teaching and learning process" (Wassenmiller, 2010, Sept 28).

In fact, in some cases, technology may actually be a distraction to the learning process. For students today, technology is not novel. It is their life. They live in a world that is interactive, wired in and stimulating to the point of paralysis. Kristy Plander, Professor of Business Administration and Marketing at Concordia University, Nebraska, argues, "It used to be that you needed the gadget to get student attention. Today, it's silence that grabs them."

Transforming Our Minds

As teachers of the faith, we must then be good stewards of technology, remembering not only its uses but also the limits of technology and the digital culture from which it comes. We must appreciate the admonition of Paul in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. So that you may discern what is the will of God—which is good and acceptable and perfect." Technology is certainly transformative but not necessarily renewing. Thus, a wise teacher of the faith approaches the use of technology with discernment.

Caution about the effects of technology abounds in recent research. The PBS

Frontline feature, *Digital Nation*, focuses on the ways in which technology has quite literally changed the way the wired generation thinks and learns. The documentary argues in multiple ways that the digital age has changed how people think and behave. Interviewed for the telecast, Professor Clifford Nass, Stanford University, and others argue that our digital society is one in which multitasking is the norm, and few people, particularly young people, regularly focus their attention on anything. Nass argues that students "get distracted constantly. Their memory is very disorganized. Recent work we've done suggests they're worse at analytic reasoning. We worry that [technology] may be creating people who are unable to think well and clearly" (Rushkoff & Dretzin, 2010, Feb 10).

Mark Bauerlein, a professor at Emory University and author of the book, *The Dumbest Generation*, states that despite access to more information and more technology, students today aren't better off academically. He states, "When *The Chronicle of Higher Education* surveyed college professors about basic skills today as compared to 10 years ago, only 6 percent of them said that college students come into their classes very well prepared in writing. By a 2-to-1 margin they said basic skills are worse today than they were a decade ago" (Rushkoff & Dretzin, 2010, Feb 10).

Maryanne Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University and the author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, explains, "We are not only what we read, we are how we read." She suggests that our students are replacing the kind of deep reading that emerged with the ability to read books for a more superficial scanning approach to distilling information from text—Net reading. With Net reading, our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remain largely disengaged (cited by Carr, 2008).

Among the concerns of scholars is that young people spend little time evaluating information and understanding what information is important, and they use less sophisticated research strategies. Ultimately, despite access to more information, they understand less. A study conducted on library behaviors at the University College of London states, "The Google generation, that grew up online, does not use technology well. The information literacy of young people has not improved with the widening access to technology: in fact, their apparent facility with computers disguises some worrying problems" (University College of London, 2008).

Whether or not the claims of these scholars are valid or replicable remains to be seen. And independent of other realities, these may not be a reason for the teacher

of the faith to reject the use of technology in the classroom. However, it should cause us to take a step back and open ourselves to the possibility that less may be more when integrating technology into our classrooms. Educational technology is relatively new, and some tools, like the Internet, are essentially a technological experiment.

Internet pioneer, Jaron Lanier, in his treatise, *You Are Not a Gadget*, argues this point. "If we build a computer model of an automobile engine, we know how to test whether it's any good … when it comes to people [we] technologists must use a completely different methodology. We don't understand the brain well enough to comprehend phenomena like education or friendship on a scientific basis." So, when technologists build software models and allow people to use them, they have no idea what will happen. Lanier contends that technologists don't know what they are doing to people's lives when they allow people to live their lives through what is functionally an experimental computer model. He asks, "How can we ever know what we might be losing?"

Less Is More

Even meta-studies which support educational technology and which suggest that students with access to instructional technology have better academic performance than those without report that technology in classrooms is not universally beneficial and that the tool must be utilized with the proper goals and objectives to be effective (e.g. Schacter, 1999; Ringstad & Kelley, 2002).

Research illuminates the limitations of select technology used in the classroom. Considering the implications of Lang's limited capacity model, a study published by the *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* examined the effects of laptop computers in the classroom and cognitive load. The results showed that students instructed to use their computers during class scored significantly lower on lecture comprehension measures than students who didn't use laptops during the lecture. It's likely that some of the low scores were due to inappropriate web use during the lecture, but even students who used computers and Internet technology to learn more about the lecture material in class did worse on comprehension tests than students who didn't use computers at all. The study concluded that even when students were looking at information pertinent to the subject, their attention was divided, making it harder to understand the lecture material (Hembrooke & Gay, 2003).

It's not just student use of the technology that can be a concern. Teachers using technology as teaching tools often employ the technology poorly. Cognitive load theory tells us that the presence of too much text, irrelevant images, or simultaneously reading text and listening to narration, can result in cognitive overload. However, how often do instructors fill a PowerPoint slide with text, nonsense images, and/or read directly from the slide? (Mayer & Moreno, 2003; Sweller & van Merrienboer, 1998; & Wassenmiller, 2010). The lecture is lost to the image.

While arguably these studies may suggest as much need for better technology training as they do for reducing the use of technology, select universities have heeded their cautions to reduce their use of technology in the classroom to assist their students. For example, the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University in Texas is trying removing computers and equipment like DVD players and projectors from its classrooms. The project was based on a paper published by the school's dean, Jose Bowen, titled *Teaching Naked*, which argued that professors use technologies like PowerPoint as crutches. "Class time should be reserved for discussion, he contends, especially now that students can download lectures online and find libraries of information on the Web. When students reflect on their college years later in life, they're going to remember challenging debates and talks with their professors. Lively interactions are what teaching is all about," Bowen argues (Young, 2009). The Meadows School switched over to its new teaching approach about two years ago, and although initially some students complained about the change, overall Meadows School reports positive outcomes. The goal, and apparently the outcome, was that students have learned to talk to one another, challenge one another, and learn from conversation.

Is this not the primary way in which Christ modeled his teaching? By building relationships, speaking honestly, challenging error, and speaking the truth in love? Such a reality can never be lost on any of us. In today's world, students need to realize that life doesn't happen solely on-line, and a media-saturated classroom can't substitute for real talk and real people. This point is reinforced by a study published by Noelle Chesley in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Despite claims that technologies like cell phones, electronic messaging and e-mail make it possible for people to keep in touch and to maintain a broader range of personal and professional relationships, data from over 1,300 working adults revealed that the more they used their cell phones, the less happy participants were and the less satisfied they were with their family lives. The responses showed that technology blurred personal and professional boundaries, allowing work to come home and making it harder for people to concentrate on their families. Similarly, an Associated Press poll of 2,207 undergraduate Facebook users at 40 colleges and universities showed that despite hundreds of "friends," they interact with few of them, and 80 percent don't find it an effective medium for dealing with personal conflicts and issues. Responses to the poll note that for many students, social networking makes them more vulnerable and exposed and can lead to voids in face-to-face interaction (Chapman, 2010; Fram & Tompson, 2010).

Meanwhile, many students can't imagine what it would be like to turn off the technology. Chapman (2010) reports that 57 percent of her respondents said a social media block-out would make them more
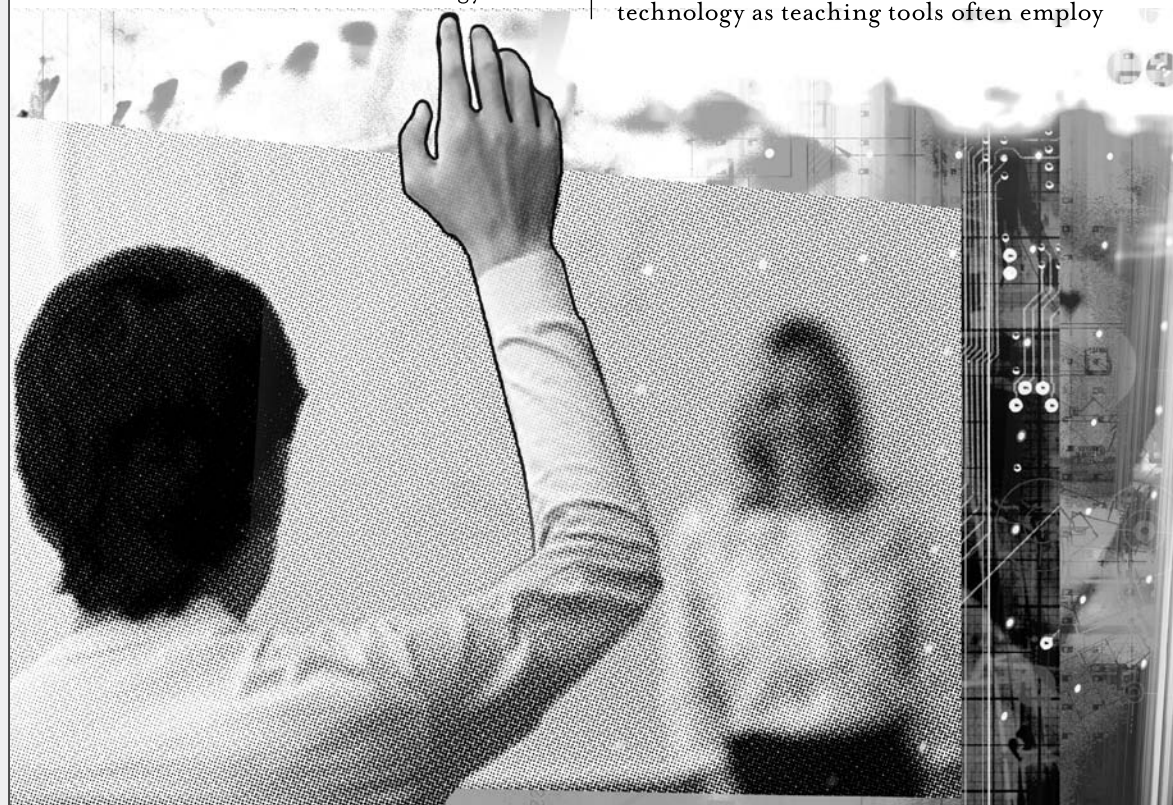
stressed, while 25 percent reported that it would take pressure off. The majority reported that they felt the need to respond immediately to incoming texts and wonder why it is that others do not immediately respond to their texts. Douglas Rushkoff, of *Digital Nation*, comments, "[It] isn't as easy as turning off your email program. If you turn off your email program, it's not the software that's going to complain, it's the people on the other side—your friends, your boss, your bills. You know, 'Where's my report? Why haven't you answered your email? Are you mad at me?' You can't do this in isolation. If you're going to deal with the problem of distraction, it's something we're going to have to deal with together" (Rushkoff & Dretzin, 2010, Feb 10).

That brings me back to affirm those teachers of the faith who reject the tech.

I am not a Luddite. As I write, I have two laptops in front of me, one with a database open to this research article, another with a word processor at work. My Blackberry is close by. If I finish this article quickly enough, I'll play with my *Wii Fit*. I know how

technologically reliant life has become. And were you to force me back to Mr. Cochran's original point, I would argue that real "technological literacy" (knowing both the strengths and the limits of technology as well as how to use it) is a necessity in our digital world. I then would argue that our classrooms could be strengthened by not using technology at times.

Our church and our world need more people who are willing to admit that technology might be hindering us as much as it is helping us—and that our sisters and brothers who are not "integrating technology into the classroom" may have good reasons for that decision. When I am honest with myself, I realize that it's a lot harder to "teach naked," and I value my colleagues and my mentors who opened up the world and the faith to me with words and wisdom alone. Our church and our world need teachers who have the courage to turn off their computers and learn how to have real human interactions within their classrooms. Our church will never suffer under teachers of the faith who realize that their calling is first and foremost about people, not machines.
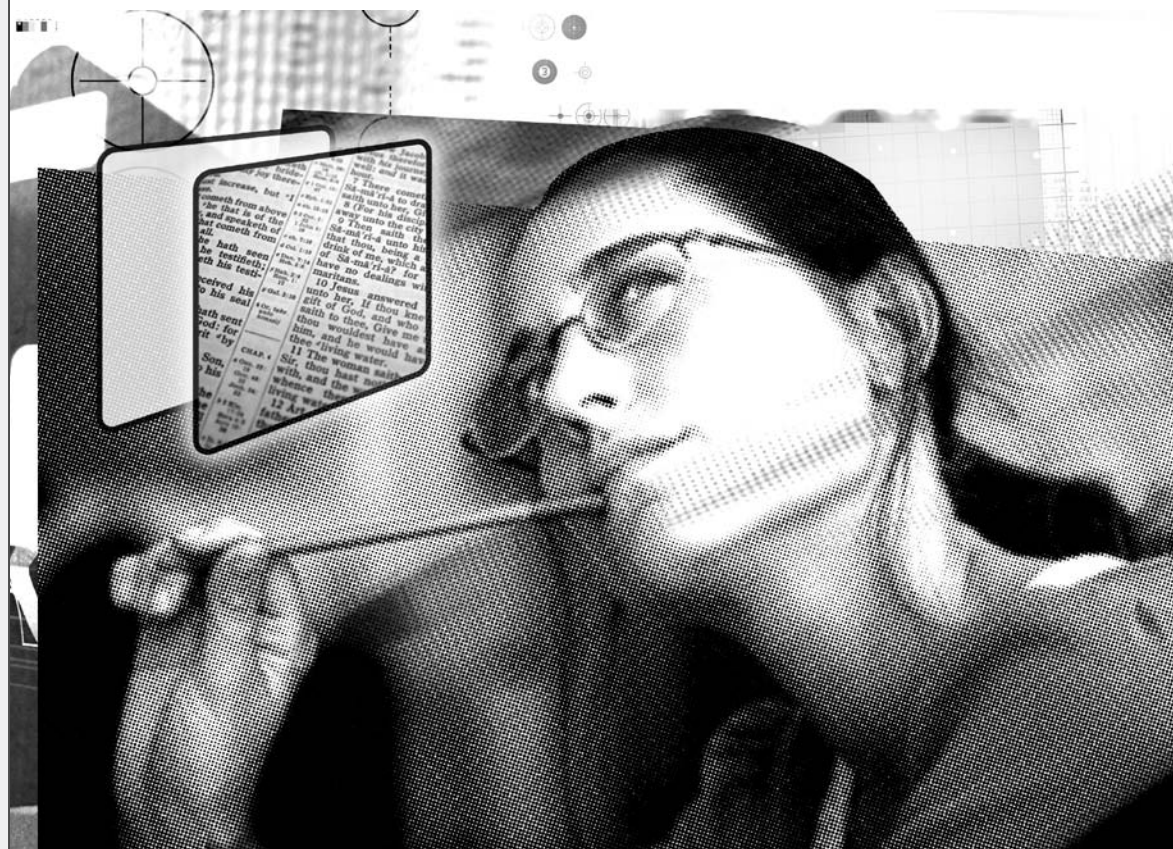
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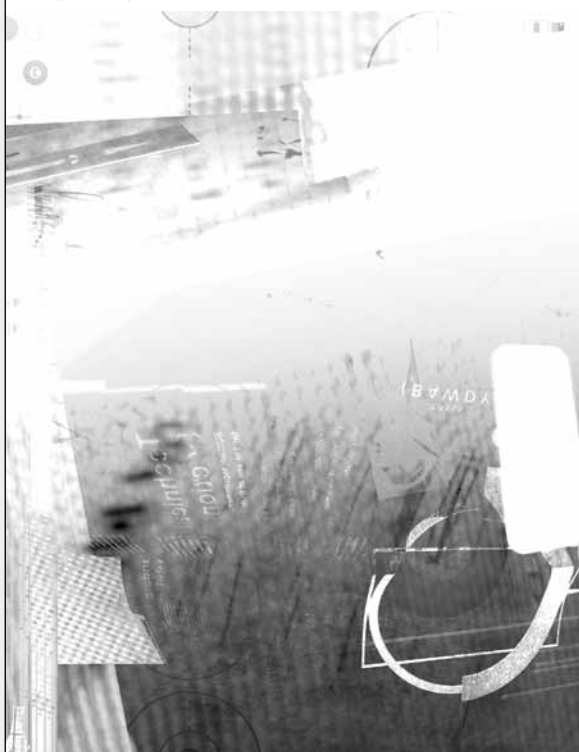
Dr. Michael Uden & Dr. Bernard Bull

"Is it OK To Be a Technology Illiterate Teacher of the Faith?"

"No!"
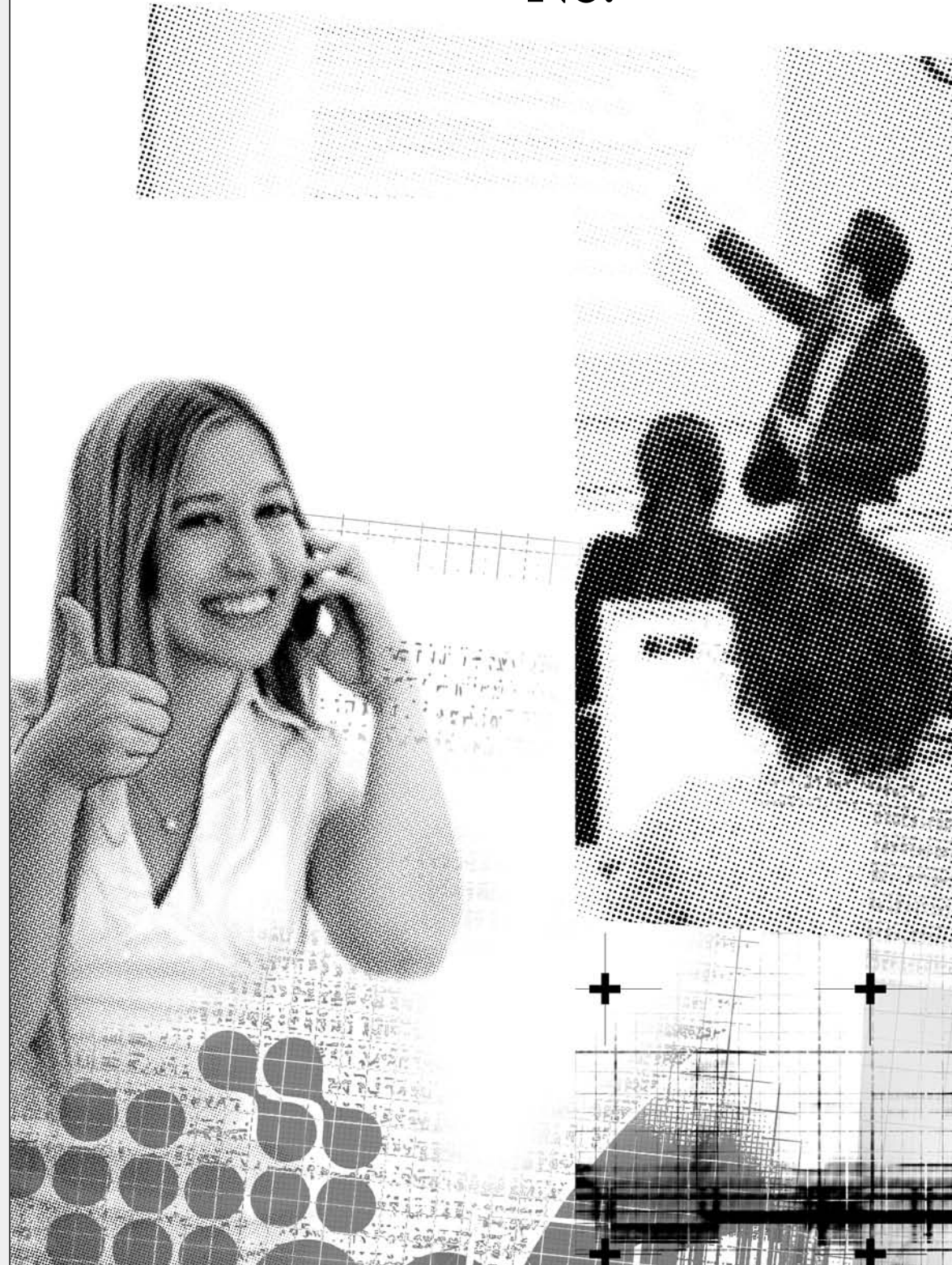
We believe, now more than ever, that Lutheran educators need to be talking with one another and others about the vital ministry in which they are engaged. Similarly, this article is a conversation with us, two Christian educators with opinions and ideas to share. As you read it, you will hear from both of us—Michael Uden and Bernard Bull. It is not important to know "who said what," but it is vital for you to join in the exchange of ideas.

Recently I was participating in a teachers' conference in South Dakota, but the conversation reminded me of others in which I have been involved, particularly lately. In the room with me were dozens of committed Lutheran educators, representing the whole gamut of experience and background. Yet one single question connected us all: How do we share the love of Jesus with the families we now serve in schools that are far different than the ones we attended or for which we prepared to serve in ministry?

Each time I am engaged in this discussion, I can identify a myriad of ways in which schools, families, and our collective culture have changed, even in the last decade. Chief among them is the increased use of technology and the rise of digital culture to intersect most every facet of our daily lives. As I compose this article at the keyboard of my laptop computer using a web-based tool with which to collaborate with my co-author, the radical and far-reaching changes in technology are strikingly apparent. And while some might bemoan the scope and speed at which that "technology revolution" has occurred, the students and families in question would be served better if I instead viewed it as a mission and ministry opportunity through which the Holy Spirit can work.

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Does Technology Have a Role in Teaching the Faith?

There are those who believe technology has no place in the teaching of the faith as it represents a distraction or diversion. Young people especially are already far too engrossed in their game system or cell phone, detractors might indicate. Why attempt to distort something so sacred (the message of salvation) by intermixing it with something as blighted and baneful as technology?

There are numerous ways to answer that question, both pedagogical and spiritual. In teaching, it is hard to refute the notion that context matters. And while transference of knowledge is an ultimate goal, most teachers recognize that students' initial understanding is often quite connected to existing knowledge (schema), scaffolded with their rudimentary understanding and limited experience. Christ, the Master Teacher, demonstrated that pedagogical awareness by helping people consider spiritual truths and principles through the instructional strategy of parables. When he taught a largely agrarian group of people, he used metaphors of farming. When debating Pharisees, he used the context of civil and religious law. In Acts 17, Paul looks to engage Athenians in "faith conversations" not in his comfort zone, but in theirs, as he started the dialogue with what or whom they knew (even an altar to an unknown god and referencing their own poets). That pattern is evident in a number of the epistles. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors to be very mindful of the real-world context to which they were addressed. The ideas were concrete and applicable. In the same way, a 21st century teacher of the faith needs to meet her students at the place and in the context at which they are—and that is often in front of a computer screen! A failure to do that—either in the time of Paul or today—puts people at risk to perceive religion as irrelevant and out-of-context for the real needs and situations they are facing in their lives.

Imagine walking into a room full of people who all speak Spanish, and you do not. Your mission is to build relationships and to nurture the faith of these people. How do you do it? Each person reading this article may suggest different action steps, but learning

the language of the people and learning about their lives would likely be near the top of all lists. Without language, this task would be nearly impossible. However, it would be a mistake to assume that simply learning Spanish grammar, syntax and vocabulary would be adequate. We recognize that language goes beyond those elements. There is a range of cultural norms and values that are present in language as well. Ignoring these can lead to a myriad of awkward moments and missed opportunities. And while learning the language and colloquialisms, there is the opportunity of getting to know the people in the room: learning about their beliefs, values, joys, fears, passions, interests, concerns, and how they spend their time. Getting to know the people at this breadth and depth would afford one a number of wonderful opportunities for helping them to consider the significance of Jesus Christ in their daily lives.

Now let's modify the example. Instead of walking into a room where everyone speaks Spanish, imagine that it is a room full of native English speakers who have grown up in a digital world, rich with 24/7 connectivity, the ability to instantly connect with people from around the world, and access to more information (both reliable and unreliable) than they could possibly consume in a dozen lifetimes. It is truly as if you stepped into a different culture, or at least a qualitatively

different sub-culture. Ministry to this group is also predicated upon learning the "language" and getting to know the people. To disregard these as irrelevant for ministry could prevent wonderful discipleship opportunities. This is not to say that every teacher must become a "techie." Rather we learn about the digital lives of those to whom we are ministering. How we use what we learn is a matter of much prayerful consideration. At times, it may actually result in dis-integrating technology while teaching rather than adding an array of technological bells to a given lesson. In the end, it is essential to invest in the lives in which youth are living and how the digital world around them is influencing all sorts of things, including their beliefs and values.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must confess that this mindset is not necessarily natural or easy for me. In helping my graduate students understand their pedagogical profile, I often remind them that unless one makes a conscious decision to do otherwise, teachers teach like they were taught (and/or teach as they like to be taught). Of course, as a product of Lutheran education, my teachers never once pulled up a website or used a SmartBoard to capture my attention. Similarly, when my grandmother attended a Lutheran elementary school in the early 1900s, she never saw a filmstrip or experienced the

magic of an overhead projector—yet she did receive all of her instruction in German! One of my philosophical underpinnings is "perennialism," as I believe there are timeless truths and ideas which should be conveyed in education. Yet I also recognize that in 2010, as we know more about how students come to know and test and understand new ideas, to ignore technology as a delivery system with which to share what is without question the most important "Truth" there is would be a missed opportunity. Because unlike an overhead projector, which shaped a classroom experience, technology shapes the totality of our lives. Whether or not we wish to acknowledge it, we are living in a digital culture.

Consider this question for a moment. Where and how are the majority of ethical and religious messages being communicated in the lives of young people today? In schools, we invest a great deal of time preparing students to be critical readers, but that is primarily focused upon teaching them to read and analyze text. What about all of the ethical and religious content that is shouting at all of us from every magazine, billboard, television commercial, movie, photograph, and YouTube video? All of these messages are laden with values. Consider this: if one does not know how to read text, then a book cannot have an influence. In the media and image-rich digital world, however, this is

different. Even if one does not know how to "read" an image, film, or commercial, it can wield an influence. The millions spent monthly on marketing campaigns and advertisements indicate as much. As a result, part of teaching students about the unchanging Truth of God's Word is helping them to engage in what might be called visual or media literacy as a spiritual discipline, a sort of discernment where they learn to read these messages and then compare them to what God has to say in His Word. When appropriate, we also get the opportunity to help students learn to "write" with visual and media, even to communicate their faith in a visual world. Of course, all of this requires a Christian teacher who is willing to welcome the digital world into the discipleship conversation, who is willing to learn and explore this digital world, and who is willing to serve as a Christian mentor alongside students, as they learn to read and write with Christian discernment in such a world.

Moreover, while most certainly nothing is impossible for God, faith building is hard to conceptualize as occurring only within the confines of a classroom. Faith building is not a "class session." It is about relationships— certainly between God and persons, but also between the redeemed and those who do not yet know Him. Digital anthropologists would have data to purport that there is no shortage of relationships evidenced within the world wide web. Yet in a digital world where one can be "unfriended" in Facebook at the click of the button or bullied and pick-pocketed with the move of a mouse, is there a more imperative realm than technology for mission-minded Christians? As educators who serve as encouragers and mentors for young people, disregarding the impact and resources of technology is akin to a Bible translator ignoring the native language of the very people he was sent to assist. Young people today are "digital natives," to be true; but they are no less in need of a Savior today than they have ever been. And for anyone who has spent more than two minutes online, is there a better reason than the "world wide web" for which to equip people with spiritual wisdom and discernment?

What Is a Rationale for Asserting that a Teacher Can Promote Growth in Faith Most Effectively through Technology?

The reality for this 21st century is that technology does not appear to have an "off" button for most. Even while not working on or with technology, Neil Postman and others would argue that it is most definitely working *on* or *with us*. The messages and impact of technology shape the perceptions and actions of the entire popular culture to a great extent—and certainly the younger generation of "technology natives." If the avenues of technology are truly the places to which individuals gravitate to share their hearts and lives, we teachers of the faith need to walk alongside people in the digital places they arguably "live" most often and most openly. Sharing a word of Scripture or prayer with them there may not be any more natural or comfortable for them, but at least that is the place at which they themselves feel most natural and comfortable, the most unguarded and open.

And now for the quintessential Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" If the digital culture is one through which teachers of the Christian faith must work in order to reach young people today, how does this happen? One gateway for an educator is by modeling the digital tools and resources available to Christians. For example, www. biblegateway.com provides free access to God's Word in literally dozens of translations and languages. Students with smart phones can carry God's word with them—certainly in their hearts, but also in the palm of their hands. Several other biblical "apps" are available as well. As a teacher of the faith prepares for a lesson, one need not look any further than one's computer for a vast library of resources. Not only can one easily find images of Old Testament cities or travels of Paul and Silas, but one can also access a real-time satellite view, a blog written by someone living there today, or an archived podcast by a Lutheran seminary professor on the chapter and verse.

In addition, as growing Christians look for opportunities to support mission and ministry elsewhere, the world wide web makes that world of possibility far smaller and flatter. The Faith Comes by Hearing Project (www.faithcomesbyhearing.com) works to provide copies of Scripture on thumb-sized USB drives. Several years ago, I was struck when my elementary-school son (who has spent his entire life in Lutheran schools) came home with a "Bible stick" which he could not wait to play. And he did … for days. The difference was not in the Word itself but rather in the accessibility and utility through which it was available. Similarly, anyone can have a far greater awareness and connection to the lives and work of world missionaries through the digital media. Each month, I receive two separate e-newsletters from missionaries I support, providing me updates and resources on their challenges and celebrations. I can also visit their web or Facebook page, where I can make an online donation or write a word of encouragement on their wall. A note which would have taken several weeks and an array of postage to send even a decade ago—had I taken the time to write it at all—can now reach them instantly. Imagine the possibilities for outreach through these tools—in the power of the almighty Holy Spirit and in the excitable zeal of young people connected to Christ! We all recognize that there is no shortage of
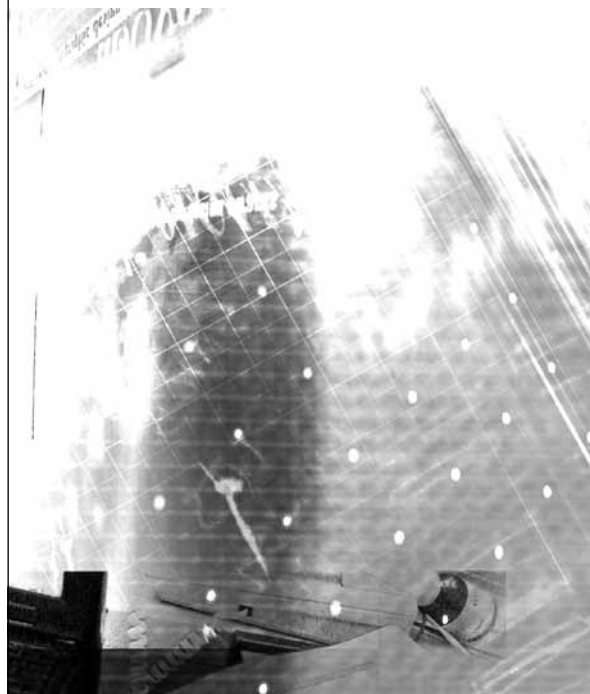
depravity in the world—real or digital. Yet by intentionally engaging Christians in direct conversations about spiritual warfare, compromise, and discernment, we can begin to dialogue about issues of life and faith which are imperative for their spiritual survival.

Growing as a Digital Citizen and Teacher of the Faith

Like many things in life, we often benefit from the advice and mentoring of those with more knowledge and experience on a topic. My friend and colleague, Dr. Bernard Bull, is a keen scholar whose work and interest often centers on digital culture. As the director of both the instructional Design Center as well as the Educational Design and Technology graduate program at Concordia University Wisconsin, he spends his day helping digital immigrants like me become more comfortable and competent in a digital world. In summary, he offers these steps anyone can take to grow as a digital citizen and teacher of the faith:

1. *Think Like a Missionary*. Effective missionaries build authentic relationships with those whom they have come to serve within the natural context of the culture in which they find themselves. As teachers of the faith, we have been called to serve people living in a digital culture. We need to interact within the context of that culture,

understanding the language and experiences of their daily life. Technology provides that entrance point. For a biblical model, look no further than Acts 17, where Paul learned about the culture in Athens, and then used that knowledge as a way to effectively communicating God's unchanging Truth.

2. *Be a Digital Ethnographer*. In order to understand a specific culture, ethnographers use interviews and observations, even field experience. Whom might you interview to learn more? Ask a young person to give you a tour of their Facebook page or bookmarked websites. Now think of classroom learning experiences in which that new knowledge and experience can help you connect with faith mentoring. For example, if Jesus' disciples had Facebook pages, what would they have posted as their status when Christ called them to "Follow Me"? When they witnessed His healing hand? After the Last Supper? On Easter morning?

3. *Move Into a Digital Neighborhood*. Many people initially uncomfortable with the digital world are surprised to learn how many communities of likeminded individuals they might find once there. In order to gain some firsthand experience, visit an online discussion board. You will likely find members there who share your ideas and convictions, and you may also realize that some of your stereotypes and misgivings about "that online stuff" were unfounded.

4. *Demonstrate that He's Got the WHOLE World in His Hand.* There is a real risk of disconnection for young people who segregate "church" from the digital world in which they spend a far greater portion of their lives. Teachers of the faith need to help them recognize that our God is the God of the visible and invisible, the tangible and the digital. Consider using the Internet to illustrate ways in which the commandments are broken. Initiate an online discussion forum and ask your students to post a reply to a "faith question" you post each week. Not only will it provide reinforcement of a concept outside of class time, but it might also provide you with better and more candid evidence of students' ideas and beliefs.

5. *Teach the Act and Art of Questioning.* It is not enough for us to ask questions of our students. We must teach them to ask questions of themselves and their world, especially when they are online. "What is the real message that is being conveyed to me?" "Does this website help or hurt my faith walk?" "Am I being salt and light to a world in need of Him?"

6. *Beyond Criticism: Creation.* While it is imperative that we educate ourselves and others about digital dangers, if we convey only a wary or critical perspective about technology, kids will soon discount all we have to say. The Lutheran tradition, however, from our stained glass to our musical compositions, is about the creative arts! Harness that creativity in a digital context. Develop digital stories, both as teaching tools for your classroom as well as outreach tools for those searching for meaning on the web. Share them on YouTube or GodTube.

7. *Digital Literacy.* If we are going to understand the messages of the digital world, we must learn to read them—and there is no shortage of material. Help students begin to discern the use of images and messages in advertisements, television and websites. Evaluate cartoons and toys—even the packaging for everyday products. From what worldview have the ideas been formed? Then encourage them to design a logo or a message

which proclaims Christ in the same forum. Consider engaging in a sort of show, tell and study activity. Have students bring "artifacts" into class from their digital lives. Have them explore what God's Word has to say about the topic. This simple activity can provide amazing opportunities to help students consider the significance and relevance of God's Word upon all aspects of life, including life in the digital world. After all, stealing and committing adultery are just as present in the digital world as they are in the non-digital aspects of life.

8. *Teach the 5+1 Media Literacy Questions* (the 5 are from the Center for Media Literacy—http://www.medialit.org/). This is similar to the "5Ws and H" lesson you might use for teaching expository writing in language arts class, but its relevance for the digital world is perhaps even more significant. Who created this message? What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? How might different people understand this message differently? What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? Why is this message being sent? What does God's Word say about it?

9. *Cultivate a Deep Understanding of the Difference Between Information, Knowledge, and Wisdom.* We live in an "information age," but information is not the same as knowledge or wisdom. In fact, teachers often ignore that distinction, feeling woefully less equipped to interact in the digital world than their students. In reality, however, adult faith mentors have a spiritual discernment and life experience which their students desperately need. "Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad." As Neil Postman noted in a lecture to students at Calvin College, the greatest problems in our world today are not a result of a lack of information. Knowledge and most often wisdom are far more powerful tools when it comes to the biggest challenges of life.

10. *Dis-integrate Technology.* Rather than encouraging everyone to take a sledgehammer to their computer screen (although likely we have all wished to do that on occasion), this

lesson is the value of unplugging in a high tech world. That might seem counterintuitive in a position paper on the importance of technology, but it is very biblical. God instituted a day of rest at creation. Jesus separated himself for periods of time during His earthly ministry in order to rest, reflect, and rejuvenate. So, too, even digital citizens must be mindful that simplicity (no footprint on the technology grid) is a precious gift among the din of a 24/7 world. Toward this end, consider a Christian version of what AdBusters promotes, a "Digital Detox Week" (https://www.adbusters.org). Challenge yourself and others to unplug and reconnect with the wonders of God's creation, to "be still and know that He is God" and to make room in our lives for the many calls to Christian prayer and meditation that are modeled throughout the Psalms.

11. *In Christ Alone.* In the end—and from the beginning—it is all about Jesus. Technology will never be a means of grace, but it can be the means through which God's Word can be proclaimed. Consider how you might help all understand that solutions to our greatest needs are found in Christ, but that the blessing of technology can be used to equip people for sharing that same message of Christ with the world.

The reality is, technology is not a fad. Nothing in the literature or participant trends indicates it is going to "go away." Instead, there is much evidence to suggest that the traditional brick and mortar school experience is becoming extinct. To some degree, in order to save costs and reach more students, "hybrid" instruction (that which involves both face-to-face and online instruction) will be on the rise. For that reason, for a teacher education program to not equip future educators with a technology toolbox would at least be akin to not providing them curriculum and methodology in how to teach, say, language arts or science. We contend, however, that the consequences of entering the world of education without "technology literacy" are far more dire—for one's prospects of employment, to be sure, but—far more importantly—for one's ministry.

For those who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with this strange new digital world, you are not alone. God's people have been overwhelmed by what lies ahead for as long as … well … for as long as there have been God's people. Thanks be to God that we can find direction and hope in the promises of His Word and bring that Word to people in new and exciting ways … in a world that needs it more than ever.

book reviews

Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives.

John G. Palfrey and Urs Gasser.
New York: Basic Books, 2008.

It is not unusual for older generations to be baffled by the life styles and fads embraced by younger generations, to not understand their hair styles, clothing choices or music types, and to overestimate their negative influences. Rock and roll was to be the moral demise of the youth of the 50s. The hippie influence of the 60s was sure to derail young people from becoming productive and responsible adults. The ideas and behaviors of the youth differed so drastically from those of adults that they judged the youth harshly, and attempted to ban important facets of their lives without trying to understand why young people were embracing them. In most cases the "devastating" long-term effects were totally overestimated.

In *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, Palfrey and Gasser address the issues faced by the new rock-and-roll-hippie generation, digital natives. Digital natives, individuals born after 1980, have much in common with previous generations who revolutionized what it meant to be young. All had innovative ways to express themselves, felt a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves, and were misunderstood by adults. Digital natives also differ in very significant ways. First, the individuals most affected by previous revolutionary youth movements were teenagers and young adults. Second, digital natives range in age from birth to 30. Third, the youthful antics of previous generations are stored as memories or as fading Polaroid pictures tucked away. Fourth, the antics of digital natives are public, transferable, and permanent. They are saved on Facebook, text messages and YouTube videos, making it impossible to

erase evidence of activities that are best forgotten. Finally, the most radical ideas and behaviors exhibited by individuals of previous movements were abandoned by most as they merged with mainstream society to find jobs and start families. There will be no moving out of the digital age. Digital natives are living in a new world that will continue to change at an unprecedented pace.

I am not a digital native, I don't Twitter and I'm not on Facebook. However, being a psychologist, I have a good understanding of what technology means for those who use it. Palfrey and Gasser investigate the effects the digital world means for those who use it. Palfrey and Gasser investigate the effects the digital world might have on this generation in the areas of self-identity, privacy, safety, creativity and innovation, information quality and overload, learning and activism. Every area has the potential to have unprecedented positive and negative impacts on not only digital natives but also the world. The authors stress that parents, educators, companies, the government and digital natives themselves need to be responsible and suggest specific actions and behaviors for each. I found all of this very interesting but was especially interested in the sections addressing teachers and parents.

Most educators are familiar with the issues of pirating, information quality, and to a lesser degree information overload. Questions such as "Do we need to overhaul how we teach in order to 'match' the digital world?" are being asked, but are we considering the effect that technology is having on our students as a whole? Are we asking questions such as "How are young

adults being affected psychologically by a world that changes second-by-second?" This question is one that should interest parents also.

Many parents do not understand technology and use this lack of knowledge to excuse themselves from being good parents. They fail to educate their children about privacy issues and do not monitor their texting and use of social networking sites. They do not teach children how to handle the overload of information both available to and directed at them. Specifically, they fail to prepare their children to live in the digital world. An important point made by the authors is that in many ways the world of today is not that different than it was 50 years ago. What this means for parents of digital natives is that we need to be familiar with the technology being used; understand the potential positive and negative impacts of that technology; reinforce thoughts and behaviors that will result in positive outcomes and educate children about and impose restrictions on thoughts and behaviors that may result in negative outcomes. In other words—parents need to be good parents.

The authors state: "We too often overestimate the ways in which the online environment is different from real space." As in the past, banning and abolishing what we don't understand will not help digital natives. What will help digital natives become successful, productive members of a society that offers infinite opportunities is for educators to be good educators and for parents to be good parents—which is the way it has been for generations.

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Thy Kingdom Connected: What the Church Can Learn from Facebook, the Internet, and Other Networks.

Dwight J. Friesen.
Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.

It was with great anticipation that I opened the book and started plowing through it, expecting to find some great insights into the Digital Generation, some exciting new ways to use Facebook and other on-line networks as tools to advance God's kingdom. The anticipation created by the book's tagline was met with disappointment. I read and read … but by about half-way through the book I realized that the word "facebook" would probably not appear at all. That realization proved incorrect; at some point I do remember seeing the word used once in passing. This, then, is most certainly **not** a book about how to use Facebook and other tools to further the Church's work.

What is it about? It's about the problems of being part of the Bride of Christ in a sinful world. It easily points out what is wrong with the Church, the bored meetings (pun intended), the time away from family and friends, the time and energy spent volunteering for this or that with no immediate felt-return on the investment, and so forth. It seeks to build on "feelings of being disappointed or hurt by the institutional church," and suggests a "sense of new freedom in post-church life." And it provides an answer—he calls it "God's networked kingdom."

Friesen proposes that we adopt a whole new paradigm for "doing church." It is a vision that is concerned with relationships, with networks, with connections of people to one another. Friesen uses metaphors drawn primarily from the world of technology and network theory. He uses words such as "links" to designate what are usually termed "relationships"; "individuals" become "nodes" as he spins his metaphor. As St. Paul used "Body of Christ" imagery in 1 Corinthians 12 to help us understand the kingdom of God, so Friesen uses network theory. Paul accomplished his purpose in one chapter; Friesen takes almost 200 pages to flesh out his.

At its core, Friesen's longings seem to be born of an age-old wish, namely, that human beings might relate to one another without structure, without bureaucracy, and without human conflict. It's a very utopian

goal, and as likely to be achieved in this world as … utopia. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Jesus also has called us to live in *koinonia* with one another, and Friesen's work has value in pointing us toward that calling of fellowship with one another, in spite of ourselves.

There are certainly a few concerns with Friesen's view of the church. We are encouraged to set aside doctrines that divide (already in the Preface we read about a faith community which he envisions, "marked by a different kind of structure, without dogmas of exclusion." This is but the first volley of encouragement toward eliminating divisions—not a bad goal in itself—after all, Jesus also prayed for unity. However, there seems to be a dangerous willingness to set aside biblical truth to achieve that goal. In addition, Friesen does not deal well with the role of leadership in the church; he admits that he has "a deep struggle with the word 'leader'." The role, then, of leader in this new "Christ-commons" paradigm is very vague. In his discussion of what this leadership entails, I found no discussion of the biblical doctrine of the pastoral office nor a discussion of the servant-leadership of Jesus presented in John 13. With tongue only partly lodged in my cheek, I would say that Friesen might benefit from an immersion in Concordia University's servant-leadership model and how that is lived out in the life of church.

Friesen's book is not for those who desire to learn insights for church life and leadership from social media such as Facebook. And it is not for those who want a deep theological treatise on life in the Body of Christ. Nor is it filled with practical tips on how to "do church" in the 21st century. What is it then? It is simply an introductory exploration of what the church can learn from network theory.

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SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World.

Douglas Estes.
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Some ministries use electronic resources minimally; others are on the bleeding edge; most are somewhere in between. I use PowerPoint, manage web pages, encourage ministry students to use project management software, and conduct courses completely online. I've counseled couples' premarriage sessions and taught both adult and youth confirmation classes online. But … I do not have an avatar (an alter ego in a simulated world). After reading *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World*, I feel drawn to further explore and boldly address this silicon mission frontier that is vastly different from any carbon-based ministry.

Estes (Ph.D., University of Nottingham, UK), both pastor and seminary faculty in the Evangelical Free tradition, challenges the church to expand mission horizons into the simulated lives of millions who escape reality in a silicon environment. Their simulated lives in places like Sims and Second Life pursue secret wishes and fantasies, but include exploring Christianity more often than I imagined. Estes speculates why those who are unlikely to enter a church in the real world seek churches in a simulated setting.

Estes describes life and ministry at simulated churches like the Anglican Cathedral in Second Life and St. Pixels. Most online churches have very traditional simulated architecture and host worship and ministries that replicate brick and mortar experiences. Worshipers select and sit in pews or chairs, use a liturgy and hymnals or worship folders, or sing words off a media screen, accompanied by organ, praise band, or piano. Avatars listen to Scripture and sermons, and they shake hands over small talk and coffee. In a world of rather unlimited potential, simulated lives seem hauntingly parallel to real life.

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A skeptic might wonder whether the virtual church is a real church. Can a believer really engage in worship without singing hymns aloud, participating in rhythms of standing/kneeling, or joining in a chorused "Amen" or "Lord, Hear our Prayer"? Although these may not be comfortable, mission fields have always called missionaries to leave their comfort zone. My upper level theology course for future LCMS Ministers of Religion (Ordained and Commissioned) held spirited and robust online discussions of Walther's concepts of the Church Visible and the Church Invisible. They argued that the Altenburg Debate identified proper use of the Means of Grace as marks of the true Church Visible, yet the Church Invisible exists wherever true Christians gather—maybe even in an online or simulated environment.

Even more important: a skeptic might ask whether a virtual, simulated faith is a real faith. Philosophically, it seems that the answer may be yes, since actions of the avatar are guided by and become an extension of the human who manipulates that avatar's life. If an affair in a simulated environment is a real sin (of thought and deed), forgiveness proclaimed and lived out in a simulated life is equally real. The person behind the avatar can have a real relationship with God in a simulated life.

For Lutherans, Estes' most intriguing discussion explores the celebration of both Holy Baptism and Holy Communion in an online environment. In Estes' analysis, churches' sacramental practices in a simulated environment fall under one of four categories: 1) a "symbolic virtual" experience, when the human mind reflects on the spiritual nature of each sacrament without any action by the avatar; 2) an "avatar-mediated" sacrament, where an avatar participates in the sacrament within the simulated life, administered by avatar pastors/worship leaders; 3) "existential virtual" sacraments, where the human uses physical elements to participate concretely while his avatar experiences the sacrament in the simulated life; 4) an "outsourced virtual" sacrament, where the avatar administrating the sacrament contracts with a compatible-belief, real-world church to administer the rite with the human in real time and space.

Estes calls for iPastors who are adept at mission and ministry in a simulated environment, whether replicating rituals and traditions or creating new ministry models. New models might host ministries in the imaginary settings of Web 3.0, worship in Jerusalem or along the Grand Canyon, apply a creative early church model of discipleship, or creatively capitalize on social networking.

The virtual church is as unclear about its present role and future status as is the church in our carbon-based world. The simulated world has not resolved the crises or challenges facing the churches of the fallen world. Nor has it left behind the daily sinner-saint roles evident everywhere within the Body of Christ. Although there are plenty of issues needing attention in the Church Visible, Estes presents a theological, well-documented challenge for courageous, visionary Christian leaders to address. The challenges of ministry in a simulated life are real; its opportunities are exciting. I encourage reading this book to stimulate thoughtful and sincere dialogue that seriously considers ministry opportunities on this frontier.

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