

Technology and Hospitality

In church and ministry today, technology has had a major impact. Most churches have a Facebook page or a Twitter page. They'll have an online community of some form. The fact is that technology is here to stay. In fact, you're taking Christian Leaders Institute via technology and the web. So it is appropriate to think how technology and hospitality can connect. Now I must tell you that don't depend on technology to replace your real hospitality. But I will tell you that technology can be a great supporting mechanism within your church to encourage more relationship encouragement and technological hospitality if you will. The fact is social media is here to stay.

What is social media? Really, social media is people, about people. It's a way to organize people. It is for many people especially younger people but even people now---forties, fifties, sixties---it is that relational highway. It's a relationship highway. In a lot of ways, think of Facebook or social media is like a directory, the new directory with pictures like the new White Pages with pictures, the new Yellow Pages with pictures, the new directory Yellow Pages not put by a company that does it but by people who contribute at a local level to others who they are connected with.

It offers new opportunities for encouragement. Each day you can look around and encourage people, people that you in the past could not communicate with in the same way. It's a powerful communications tool. If someone were to pass away or a new birth or something, you can communicate to all your friends. In Facebook, there's like a church group and everybody can know about something quickly. The church needs to be cancelled because of a snowstorm. You can communicate that to everyone in a hurry.

It's a leadership development tool. In a place like Facebook, you can post great articles on the web that encourage everybody in the church to grow and leaders or elders. It's an evangelism tool. It can be utilized. If you find a great apologetics issue for instance and you see a great article. You can post it on your wall. So maybe you're not that aware of social media so I'm going to be basically be basic and then try to get advanced all on this presentation a little bit.

What do you got to do? I'm going to go with Facebook here. Facebook on hundreds of millions of people are involved and in your community a good share of your community will be involved with Facebook. So what do you do? Get a simple profile. It won't take long and it's free. Invite your friends.

How do you find these friends? You just type in some names right in the Search bar. In fact Facebook, they have it figured out so well that you can even help to invite friends and I don't know how they do it all but they spent a lot of million to figure that out.

When you think of your role on like Facebook, be a producer, not a time waster. What that means is put a Bible verse. We're going to talk a little bit later about some of the ideas on how you can be a producer. But I will tell you, you can take a Facebook and it becomes so interesting that you just spend hours and hours on Facebook wasting time and it's really not helping your local work in expanding of the church, of the discipling of believers. So be careful not to be a time waster.

But here are some things you can do. You are to learn them, and I'm not going to explain how to tag, but if you get involved with Facebook, they'll explain how to tag, how to connect, how to communicate the culture of your church. All of these things are tools at your disposal for free. Now if you're in the third world and hardly know anything about Facebook yet, I understand this isn't the most relevant to you.

But I promise you that in three, four, five years, these tools will be common in your area as well. In ten years, who knows? If you're a pastor in the third world in Africa, start getting in your mind that these technological tools will be at your disposal. If you're in America or Canada or Europe or South Africa, some of the Asian countries, this social media is everywhere right now.

If you're on social media, make it a practice to chat a few minutes with people that are in your church. But be sensitive about interrupting people. Here's what I would do in the chat. In Facebook they'll have like who's online right now so I'll just look through. Oh, there's George in my church. "Hi, George. Any prior concerns today?" "No, thanks, Pastor" or "Yes, Pastor, as a matter of fact..." But then quickly get off because if you become the Facebook interrupter, that is not going to be good either.

Now, having said that, there are times when longer chats are excellent and will save you a meeting or help someone. I've several times had longer chats especially like you take away sort of a man-woman issue. Sometimes that's difficult anyway to have a personal meeting with the opposite sex. And if there is a pastoral care issue, you might be able to utilize the chat feature to sort of deal with that. Take interest in birthdays. Click through your church attendee's profile. That's really important to do. If you want to know your parishioners, click through their profiles and see what they're into right now. See the pictures that they're taking and posting up on Facebook.

When you look at the wall on Facebook, click the Like button as often as you can. I mean that. Be liberal in clicking the Like button but only when you mean it. They'll become like "Oh, he clicks everything." No, if you like something, you think it's cool, it kind of is impressive to you, click Like. And if you can, make a comment. On Facebook or any social media, whether it's Google or whether it's anything out there, be an encourager. Be encouraging. Don't be negative.

I tell you. Facebook is this place and Google+ and any of those things, negative people or negative comments or controversial things, they have no place on social media. And just to sort of know that going in, you can use the Event feature to communicate about an invitation. You can communicate things that there could even be something that you want people to know about and finally set up a closed private not secret group if you're on Facebook. What is it for your church. You can actually set up a closed group within your church that's private, but don't do secret. We tried that and I tell you the secret group doesn't really work because people get out of it. They can't get back in it. But private, not secret group.

Post pictures. Encourage your church members to post pictures of events at the church. In a lot of ways, you will replace a newsletter but with all sorts of volunteers having fun doing the newsletter, and you don't have a central place or have one person that's the editor, share prayer requests on that private group. Share your messages. If you have the technology to tape your message by audio or by video, make a link. Put it right on the Facebook page to all your friends, even friends in the community, or you can put it on your church closed group.

What you do is share your Facebook social media life. What's appropriate to share? What's interesting to share that could be a blessing and an encouragement to everybody else? Now, people will say, "Tell me about Twitter vs. Facebook." All I can say about that is that Facebook is more horizontal. Twitter is more vertical. What that means is if you want everybody specifically following the pastor, then Twitter is better.

But Facebook is better where they can both sort of follow the pastor but they can also follow a bunch of other people and meet other people as well. So it's more horizontal. Now I realize that Facebook has expanded to more multiple lists or group. What's interesting about that is you can have just your church's group or list and you just see that wall or those communications as well as all of your friends in general. Twitter vs. Facebook, what are you really looking for? Both of them have strengths and weaknesses.

How do you set up a group on Facebook? Well, it's really simple. Again, you have your Facebook profile. You go to Group, Add a Group. You are the administrator and set some ground rules of what the group is going to talk about. I'm going to put on the CLI course description as sample ground rules that I've included in the file that I have for our group administration in our local church. So you can write your own or add to it or take away something from it.

Evangelism. After you contact someone, ask them if they can be a Facebook friend. And this is what happens. I see it all the time. I'm on a plane or I'm talking to someone. "Hey, are you on Facebook?" If people say, "Yes, I am," they're willing to become their friend, and while you're their friend, take interest in their life with prayer or a comment or like here and there. Invite them to events that you are involved with so that the sort of casual Facebook friend might become a friend that the Lord may use for you to draw to Christ or bring to Christ.

Let's talk about some Facebook social media boundaries or any social media boundary. First of all, if you really got this going, this can be an all-day affair for you, but don't let it be. Seriously, if you're not careful, you can be in Facebook all day. You can find a reason to talk with even your church all day. And you don't get anything else done and you're not productive in all of your work. So get a good boundary there. What I found if you are in a position financially to have a smart phone, what I do is to give virtual updates. If I see something cool, I take a picture of it and just upload it to Facebook. It's as if I'm sharing something in a newsletter virtually. It's easy. It's quick. It's just right up there and you're sort of creating relational zing, hospitality glue.

Keep real meetings as a central feature of your hospitality. Don't again depend on Facebook or social media to be your hospitality. Here's another thing. Don't flirt or be bold in an inappropriate way in social media. Don't ask each other for money. Don't solicit. Don't do those. It's not a sales call. If you start talking or flirting or being bold in an inappropriate way, you will be considered a spammer even with people within your own church.

Okay. People have often asked. Okay. I am in Facebook. What about those updates? What do I do? Well, here are some suggestions. First of all, how about just a Bible verse out of the walk of your life with God. Very simply. Copy and paste it right in there. Get out there. And you'll be amazed at how many times parishioners will enjoy getting those on Bible reflections. You come across a cool quote from a book. Put down a paragraph. Put it up on Facebook.

Facebook is a window into your interesting life, those updates, those smart phone updates or a picture or something that you're going through that's kind of interesting and encouraging. Remember, Facebook is not a place to hang out dirty laundry. Post articles that you think will bless others. You find a great article about parenting? Post it. Or maybe there is something that you've seen about marriage or anything that you consider interesting. Post it. Remember to comment on others as much as possible in a positive, encouraging way.

The tagging feature is really awesome where if you take a picture of someone let's say at one of your events and they have this tagging function where you just put your mouse over someone's picture and you type their name assuming they're your friend, then they also get this on their particular profile wall. It's very encouraging. It means you notice or you recognized. Post church media regularly. If the church has something going on or an event, post it on your updates.

Social media is something that's here to stay. You can utilize the social media in a very powerful way. It can be an opportunity for you to connect more and more with your people. But remember. Social media does not replace personal contact. It only enhances what you're already doing in your local body of believers.