

Stewarding Church Technology

By David S. Bell

Amid the fallout from the economic recession, forecasters indicated that this recession is different from previous ones. One of the key differences is the advancement of technology. Cable news reported that technology has changed the “playing fields” of the financial markets and indexes. Moreover, these reports concluded that nations with predominant populations of persons educated in the use of technology will experience a quicker overall financial recovery.

Technological change in the financial world is rapidly impacting the average person. We have been launched into an age of the global economy. Multinational companies, political alliances, and distribution of natural resources are changing our economic landscape in ways not previously imagined. Even now as some economies are beginning to show a glimmer of recovery, firms and political systems are repositioning to maximize potential benefits.

Society has always experienced change, but perhaps the speed of change has achieved a revolutionized pace – the nanosecond. Technology changes are a leading indicator that rapid change is the new constant. The mass ownership of computers has revolutionized our interaction with people as well as information. E-mails, instant messages, electronic transactions, webcasting, and video-conferencing are among a few of these typical interactions. Consider some others: Do you read your church newsletter on-line? Does your church have a Facebook page? Do you Twitter about Bible studies, sermons, or other church-related activities? Do you stop at a giving kiosk to contribute your offering prior to entering the worship service?

Some churches are hesitant to embrace technological change. For instance, while many growing churches offer worship experiences interspersed with various technologies, other churches are hesitant to expand beyond its historic tradition. How do stewards of God’s resources manage this change without losing focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ?

First, we recognize that technology, like money, is not inherently good or evil. An electronic fund transfer, a giving kiosk, or a computer is not designed with a pre-determined moral code! The use of the technology is the key to unlocking whether or not the technology may advance God’s Kingdom through the Church. Many types of technology may, in fact, encourage discipleship and draw younger generations deeper in their spiritual journeys.

However, we continually are to rely on our daily, humble walk with God. The use of technology may enhance, but will not replace, our stewardship of prayers, presence, gifts, witness, and service. Daily prayer, Bible study, devotion, and meditation remain steadfast practices leading to spiritual wholeness. Worship services are opportunities for us to be stewards in a communal way. We are called to be stewards of the Gospel! As Paul wrote, “They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share . . . so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.” | Timothy 6:18-19

Second, we become stewards of technology in order to reach new generations. Churches often lag significantly behind other organizations in their use of new technology. Some of this lag time is due, in part, to fear of change, perceived financial limitations, and lack of vision. Yet, increased technology may attract new parishioners. It may facilitate enhanced pastoral care or streamlined office services. In fact, it may even lead to increased giving.

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Third, we confront our self-serving desire for new technology. If we begin purchasing the latest technology simply for the pleasure of having it, we are absorbed by the hyperconsumer culture. This self-indulgent behavior does not further our spiritual growth. It leads to the misconception that our wants are really needs. This unbalanced perspective nudges us closer to the challenge: “Choose this day whom you will serve . . . as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

Finally, church leaders seeking to nurture people in their faith development will intentionally embrace new technologies. These technologies will not be considered incompatible with faith practices. Rather, they will be considered enhancements to ministry. Growing congregations that are reaching new generations will initiate these technological advancements at a rapid pace. They will encourage electronic fund transfers, blogs, downloadable sermons, online learning communities, image-driven worship, and a wide assortment of other technologies.

If these technology changes seem too fast, remember that regardless of the pace, God remains constant throughout every nanosecond of eternity!