

Message from Pastor O'Brien

Re: Technology in the Church

September 20, 2009

Technology moves very fast these days. Back in seminary (which was more than a few years ago now) I was very proud of myself that I got on board with e-mail before I even had a computer. Of course, I only knew a handful of other people with e-mail addresses and they all lived on campus with me, but over time the popularity, and usefulness of e-mail grew of course. Now, e-mail is a wonderful tool for communicating with family and friends who live far away. It's also a great tool for sending quick messages and reminders for people who live nearby. The growing popularity of digital cameras means that we can share pictures on the internet. (I even pushed my parents into the technological age by dangling the "pictures of grandkids" carrot and forcing them to buy their first computer.) In seminary days I once used the internet to look up a book from a library in Virginia. I didn't know how to do much else. But now there is an amazing wealth of information available on the internet; the latest news, weather, dictionaries, encyclopedias, information about your church, even complete electronic Bibles in three dozen different translations. Now I can have a host of information at my fingertips simply by "Googling" a key word. I used to use e-mail to stay connected, but now people use social network programs like MySpace and Facebook. If I had more time (and though anyone would care) I could have a blog to share my every thought. And if I were more 'hip' I would understand Twitter, but I'm not.

Part of the challenge we face as a church is keeping up with technology. Right after I opened a MySpace account Facebook became the place to be so I was almost instantly out of date. When I do finally break down and figure out Twitter, everyone will have moved on to something else. As I said, technology moves very fast these days, and unless you have the time (or a teen-ager to help you), it's difficult to keep up with the latest in technology and trends. But the other challenge we face is how to use technology in the church. E-mail is a wonderful tool for sharing information, but it can be easily misused too. E-mail gives us a false sense of privacy. Someone once advised that you have to assume that anything you write in an e-mail will be read by anybody and everybody. Another piece of advice I really appreciated; "just because you can reply instantly to a message doesn't mean that you should." I've heard of many well meaning folks getting themselves in trouble because they didn't take the time to think about what they were saying and how they were saying it. When we send electronic messages we miss out on things like tone of voice and body language that we rely on in face to face communication. Even the most benign comments can be misunderstood on e-mail. Social networking sites, too, can be a wonderful tool for keeping in touch with church friends and knowing what is going on with their lives, but we do well to remember that status updates only offer a very small glimpse into someone's life.

My hope is that we, the church, can stay 'hip' enough that this web-site will be a place for people to find useful information. I hope that this website it will be a starting place for keeping in touch with church friends, and it will be a tool to help stay connected to the ministries and activities of the church. But I also hope we remember that God is all about relationships, and that we should never let the tool replace true human interaction and shared Christian love it's designed to facilitate.