

Proclaiming the Good News—in a word

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

WORDS ARE POWERFUL. But they can lose power if they lose their meaning. Blogs, tweets, podcasts...sometimes it can seem as if people have started speaking a whole new language, a language that seems to get stranger by the day, leaving more and more of us out of the conversation. If the worldwide web started out as a great place to find information, it has now moved toward facilitating communication, sharing information and encouraging collaboration. It's racing headlong into a realm called social media.

Social media broadly describes activities that combine technology and social interaction, whether using words, pictures, audio or video, individually or in combination. Social media is simply about people having conversations, talking about what is going on in the world around them and in their personal lives.

In that sense this is nothing new. The conversations are the same: people trying to make sense of the daily headlines and their personal lives, asking questions and offering advice, sharing ideas, fears, joys and hurts with those who will give an ear. It's just that people are carrying out these conversations online rather than at the water cooler, post office or coffee shop.

Consider some of these recent figures (most certainly long obsolete by the time you read them). There are more than 133 million blogs (a contraction of "web log," an online site much where people write about their interests and current events and others read then entries and comment on them) with more than 346 million people globally reading them. That's around 77 percent of active Internet users. Twitter, a relative newcomer in this world, boasts more than three million tweets per day and has seen growth of more

than 1382 % in recent months! Now also consider that Canadians spend almost 14 hours online per week.

That's a lot of words flying around the blogosphere! So how can we Christians make sure we're not being left out of the conversation? Without going to much trouble, you can simply begin by commenting on others' existing blogs—from a Christian perspective. If you believe a subject is important, you can be sure hundreds of blogs are writing about it. Try posting a comment or two and see where the conversation takes you!

But why not start a few conversations yourself? Sites like blogger.com or wordpress.com make it easy to set up a blog. Then you (or your congregation) can use it to speak about current news or share ideas you come across in your daily devotions, conversations, or Bible studies. Use a congregational blog to post sermons and encourage dialogue beyond Sunday mornings. It might also serve as an online forum for Bible studies, or ongoing catechesis. Study a good book together, chapter-by-chapter, discussing with it people from around the world. The possibilities are staggering.

If all this sounds like too many words, then microblogging (Twitter) could be more your speed.

Lutheran Church—Canada blogs:

LCC InfoDigest
www.lccinfodigest.ca
Think Digital First
www.thinkdigitalfirst.com
One2OneConnect
www.one2oneconnect.ca
On The Road
www.lccontheroad.ca

Lutheran Feeds on Twitter

@LCCInfoTweet @theLCMS
 @lutheranbible @BookofConcord

Basically, this is communicating in 140 characters or less; one or two short sentences at a time. This approach could be used for sharing information with members and friends, updating congregational schedules, providing devotional thoughts, supplementing a prayer chain, or sending out invitations to events. Many using Twitter also include a website address so people interested in your 'tweet' find further information.

However, remember that whenever you engage in conversation, you will likely encounter viewpoints not only different from yours, but perhaps even hostile. That can be disheartening but it can also be a tremendous opportunity to witness. Don't engage in conversation unless you are willing to take others seriously, treat them fairly, and answer their concerns and objections reasonably.

Few conversations online are between just two people. Others can read your words and take some good from them. Remember the words of St. Peter: "...but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Peter 3:15-16 ESV).

It's easy to see how a few carefully chosen words can quickly have a positive impact in reaching out to new people. Let's put some meaning into the online discussions by putting God's Word into the conversation.

Rev. Ken Maher is pastor at Christ our Hope, Collingwood, Ont. His blog *Hope For The Hapless* is at <http://hope4thehapless.wordpress.com> and his Twitter ID is @christourhope