

Proclaiming the Good News—just picture it

by Ken Maher

“Jacob said... ‘I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me” (Genesis 33:10 ESV).

IN OUR FIRST LOOK AT SOCIAL MEDIA we saw the staggering number of conversations taking place simultaneously over the Internet and how we can use the clear words of the Gospel through tools like blogging or microblogging (Twitter), to guide some of these conversations toward Christ. Words are important, but as the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand of them!

It is one thing to try and tell people you’re friendly—it is something altogether different to *show* them. What people read on a webpage or in a bulletin might draw them to your church, but what they *see* when they get there—the people they meet—is an important factor that could bring them back.

Audio and visual cues can have a profound effect on people’s responses to the message before them. Think how a stained-glass window can move you, or a thundering pipe organ send shivers up and down your spine. Or how a bulletin board full of pictures from a Sunday school picnic can bring a smile to your face whether you know anyone in the pictures or not.

The Internet is no different. If anything, the need for sight and sound cues is more pronounced. Music, pictures and videos become the filter through which people arrive at and respond to all other content. Most people would much rather hear or see things on their computer screen than try to read blocks of text. A large cross-section of social media, therefore, involves audio and video posting through such venues as iTunes and YouTube. Friends share pictures through sites like Picasa and Flickr. And each time a new podcast, video or photo is posted, it creates a new conversation.

Consider some figures from YouTube, the most popular online video-hosting site. It’s literally become

a household word, and 83 percent of active Internet users have clicked to watch its sometimes silly, notorious or heartbreaking mini-clips. As early as 2006, visitors to the site played 100 million YouTube videos every day and posted 65,000 new ones daily. By 2008 every minute saw 10 hours of video uploaded to YouTube. Visitors averaged 16 minutes per stay. If you wanted to watch all the content already posted to YouTube, you’d need more than 400 years of free time to do it!

For our purposes, here’s the most exciting statistic: LCC President Robert Bugbee’s Easter message on YouTube garnered more than 3500 viewings.

Can you begin to picture all the possibilities? Think about using audio, video and photos to spice up your congregation’s website. Don’t underestimate what this type of media can do to draw people in and bring them back.

You can podcast (recorded material) or webcast (live) sermons

and services to maintain contact with shut-ins and distant members. Sermons in mp3 audio format can easily be transferred to iPods or other portable devices to share with friends and family, or listened to by members as they go about their daily chores. Ongoing Bible studies or devotions can be distributed in the same way.

Keep in touch with children from your vacation Bible school once summer is over. Online pictures and photo albums can be an easy way. Set up a Flickr account (or something similar) and mail/e-mail the address to the family of everyone who attended VBS. Upload all your pictures and let the children comment on them. (Don’t forget to include some encouraging starter comments yourself.) They can download and print their favourites, reconnect with friends and remember what a great time they had! This can work for other kinds of events, youth and adult, too.

If you are going to upload any kind of media file to the web, please make sure you have all the required permissions to do so! (This applies to copyrighted hymns and liturgies too.) Before you post anyone’s picture make sure you have their permission (or their parents’) to do so. Simply make the permission part of the registration process. Some will say no. Some will have Internet safety concerns. It is important that when people look at our faces, listen to our words or watch our celebrations, we don’t inadvertently invade anyone’s privacy. It’s vital to show our respect for the spirit and the letter of all applicable laws, even as we make it easy to see and hear all the other great things about us!

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