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Communicating Effectively

ALTHOUGH *SHALOM!* **HAS** never addressed the specific subject of "communication," we have covered related issues four times: "The Media" in 1989, "Globalization and Technology" in 2006, "Media, Technology, and Faith" in 2008, and "Using Social Media Effectively" in 2019. While those previous editions focused a lot on technology, this edition emphasizes what and how we communicate the church's message using the different forms of media and technology now available to us in 2025.

My career has been in communications of one sort or another. I've thought that if I were going to college now, I wouldn't major in English but maybe in communications. Most of the communications work I've done over the years has been in print: articles, books I've edited or written, a regular column, newsletters, curricula, editorials, and more. Print is probably my preferred medium and the one with which I am most comfortable. In the last few years before I retired, however, I expanded my work into newer technologies, including website management and social media.

Two conversations recently illustrated how old-school I really am when it comes to communications and related technology. In one conversation, while we were brainstorming a future project, someone showed us a quite well-fleshed-out proposal generated by artificial intelligence (AI). I have dabbled a tiny bit in AI, but I'm also intimidated by it. I was excited by the possibilities but overwhelmed by what it would take to implement the project—including skills way beyond my capacity. That feeling of no

longer having the capacity for what it takes to communicate effectively in today's world continued in the second conversation. I decided that I am officially old!

But I don't think I am just an old fuddy-duddy who thinks the old ways were best. I appreciate and embrace most of the technology that has made it possible to communicate the message of the gospel in fresh and creative ways, although I still have some concerns, such as the ethics of AI. I am also grateful for those who keep imagining how to more effectively tell the story of Jesus and invite others to follow him.

In the lead article, Molly Pavlovich connects three words with a common root—communication, community, and communion—making the point that how and what we communicate can foster community and enrich our communion with each other in the church. Other articles affirm her point and explore how communications technology like social media, livestreaming, radio, digital storytelling, and artificial intelligence can help the church tell the story of Jesus. Ultimately, I'm reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:22 "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some." Perhaps we could paraphrase it like this: "I use whatever communications methods are available so that I can reach more people with the gospel."

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

A Communicator at the Crossroads: The Paradox of Connection

By Molly Pavlovich

IN THE CHURCH I attended growing up, I remember one of the priests' shtick was to dissect words from a Bible passage down to their Latin roots. Young as I was at the time, I didn't share the same excitement for etymology as he did. I, admittedly, zoned out.

Ironically, today I spend most of my time poring over words—whether it be reading for enjoyment or purposefully stringing together words to articulate one of the many messages I'm tasked with crafting as a communications professional.

I studied journalism in college, and found myself on the path of non-profit communi-cations after graduation. Currently, I serve as the marketing and communications manager at Messiah Lifeways, a continuing care retirement community in Mechanicsburg, PA, with strong Brethren in Christ roots. My day to day varies greatly as I juggle everything from proofing copy to planning content for our biannual *Unscripted* magazine, strategizing marketing plans, and beyond. But connecting with residents in the community is undoubtedly my favorite part.

I've always felt drawn toward better understanding people and the world we call home through the stories they live and share. Delving below the surface with strangers during interviews, then having the gift of embossing their lived experiences through the pieces I write is what I feel to be my life's purpose.

Communication, to me, is an invitation—to listen and share, to empathize and commune, to live in community with one another. It's something I'm deeply passionate about.

I realize, though, that not everyone shares that same kinship with connection. Much like my younger self, who glazed over at the religious leader's analysis of words, many people today find themselves disconnecting and disassociating.

And that's the paradox. As fast and far as we can communicate in this modern world, we risk losing the very thing communication is meant to foster: connection. It can become a tool for isolation rather than understanding.

This isn't a problem unique to younger generations. It's a challenge we all face.

At 28, I often find myself at a crossroads between "then" and "now." I was born the first day of the first month in 1997, placing me technically in Gen Z—a generation of digital natives. But my experience was somewhere in between. I remember a mostly screen-free childhood. I didn't get my first smart phone or social media account until high school. I grew up with computer games and Saturday morning cartoons, but I also watched the world shift quickly toward an always-on, always-available style of communication.

I believe other generations experience this crossroads, too. Baby Boomers adapting to smart phones. Millennials raising children in a digital world they barely recognize. Gen Alpha entering school with AI in the classroom.

As we've adapted to the times, I think that too many of us have forgotten how to slow down and truly listen. To ask better questions. To sit with silence. To be fully present with one another. That's the challenge and the invitation of communication today.

Digging into history, it's no coincidence to me that the trio of words communicate, community, and communion all share a Latin root—"communis," meaning common, shared, belonging to all. That root points to an everlasting truth: we were made for connection.

We know this from the very beginning. In Genesis, God takes one (Adam) and makes two (Eve) and then declares, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Connection was part of the design. And we see it again in Jesus's final words to his disciples: "Go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19)—a call not just to speak, but to share life, to form community, and to be in relationship through meaningful communication.

From creation to commission, communication is the thread that binds us to one another and to God.

This thread reaches its pinnacle expression in the Church in the sacrament of Communion. We hear the words, "This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you" declared aloud, echoing Christ's own words—extending them into the present—and we partake together. To receive Communion is to receive a message of unity and love.

Communion reminds us what communication is meant to be—not transactional, but transformational. Not noise, but nourishment. Not a broadcast, but a bond. A reminder of our everlasting community with one another.

I believe that we, as Christians, have both an opportunity and a responsibility to lead the way in reclaiming communication as a means of genuine connection. In a world where attention is constantly being competed for and division runs deep, we have the chance to model what it looks like to truly listen and to speak truth in love.

It's not always easy. It takes intentionality, humility, and grace. I know this firsthand from working in communication. Perfection isn't possible. I don't always get it right. Sometimes a bid for connection—a message that resonates deeply with me falls flat for others.

But that doesn't mean we stop trying. What matters is showing up with a posture of listening, learning, and continually seeking to communicate in a way that honors God, ourselves, and the people we're engaging.

The way that I see it, communication is the practice, community is the fruit, and communion is the ultimate goal.

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Denominational Communications Personnel Speak

By Salynda Hogsett and Michael Bowlin

Purposeful, Meaningful Storytelling

MY CHILDHOOD WAS was filled with stories. Every Friday, my three siblings and I (Salynda) scoured the shelves of our town's small library for next week's read. After dinner, Dad told us stories from his childhood escapades, my favorite being his runaway attempt at four years old. Before bed, we collapsed into the living room with puzzles, snacks, and coloring pages while Mom read aloud *The Hobbit, My Side of the Mountain,* and *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch.*

These stories—fictional and factual—shaped how I saw the world and the people I knew in it. Deep in my soul, I knew stories were important.

Stories are the most powerful tool at a communicator's disposal. An anecdote stays with an audience far longer than any statistic or factoid, and a complex issue is best understood through the lived example of a specific person. Stories initiate personal reflection and can even galvanize action. There's a reason Jesus frequently used parables.

In my role today as content editor for Brethren in Christ U.S., I aim to tell stories that celebrate, edify, and equip the Brethren in Christ family, primarily on our blog (bicus.org/blog). These articles serve a multitude of purposes. In addition to celebrating God's movement and sharing updates, we also prioritize stories that equip ministries, congregations, and people through the successes and challenges of others.

To that aim, I frequently turn to the principles of "solutions journalism." Solutions journalism is "rigorous reporting about how people are trying to solve problems and what we can learn from their successes and failures" (solutionsjournalism.org). Discovering this storytelling approach has transformed how I write for our blog.

I often use this basic outline, adapted from solutions journalism, when writing Brethren in Christ articles:
1) Identify the problem and its effect on the community;
2) Showcase the people, ministry, or congregation working to solve it;
3) Discuss the challenges they faced and how they overcame them;
4) Highlight how this solution is already helping; and
5) Provide resources or guidance so others may implement similar solutions.

Points three and five are my favorite parts of solutions-minded articles. Without addressing the obstacles (point three), the solution seems flat, even unattainable. Acknowledging the hardships makes the solution more rewarding and could help others avoid similar pitfalls. By offering guidance and resources (point five), we equip others to have similar impact.

My goal in writing these stories is not simply documentation. I hope that we can learn from each other and that the next generation of the Brethren in Christ family will be shaped and influenced by those who have gone before them, much in the same way the stories in my childhood shaped me.

Here are some examples of solutions stories on the blog at bicus.org/blog:
- The Story of Emerald House
- Gen Z Growth in London Church
- Cooperative Congregations
- Planting in Good Ground
- Setting the Table

Putting a Face to a Story

VISUAL COMMUNICATION HAS the power to inform and change perspectives, especially when God is acknowledged in the process. Currently, I (Michael) serve as the multimedia administrator for Brethren in Christ U.S. and throughout my time in my role, that mindset has been imperative.

The medium of video can instantly put a face to an issue and help relate the viewer to a topic that they would have never thought of before. I think back to my time on a World Missions trip in 2022 to Greece where I filmed a refugee sharing his story about escaping a terrible circumstance. In the moment, I was simply listening and being informed myself, not knowing how God would use this footage. Several months later, when screening the interview to a local congregation, comments throughout the room ranged from "I had no idea," to "what can I do to help?" In an ever-changing climate,

simple stories that are told from a human perspective have more power than one realizes.

Unfortunately, these days there seems to be a lack of willingness to sit down to watch something that challenges the viewer. Everything is fighting for our attention, from the latest Instagram reel to the next appointment on the calendar. So why should we choose to watch a video that could potentially burst the bubble that we have built around our lives? The question that remains for me is: how can I create and tell stories to break through the guards that our culture has built up? That is where my trust in God comes in.

Often, I have no idea how a video will come together, or if there is even a story in what I am filming. I might find the person I am interviewing compelling, but will someone else? In my own experience, when I put faith first and foremost in everything I create, God will use it in some way.

We have missionaries come into our office on their home visits and we have the privilege of interviewing them on camera. When I am done editing the final video, they are placed in our Multimedia Library for Brethren in Christ congregations to use. More often than not, I go on to my next project without thinking about the video again. However, when I receive feedback from congregations about how they showed the missionary's story in a service and congregants were moved to support them, then I know God is working.

When a face is put to a story, that makes the message personal. We relate to humans, because we are all walking the same path; we are all created in the image of God. It brings me great joy when that realization comes across in a video. There is nothing better than knowing that I played a small part in connecting the dots between a viewer and the storyteller on screen. The fact that through the power of visual storytelling a link can bond two people from across the world is, in my opinion, proof that God's handiwork is at play. Therefore, my challenge for us as a body of believers is to take a leap of faith. Watch something that may rock your world view. You never know how God may show up in the midst of uncomfortability.

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Redeeming Social Media: A Digital Ministry for the Church

By Dyan Garner

A FEW YEARS ago, I attended a seminar led by Pastor Chris Hall of the Trotwood Missional Community in Trotwood, Ohio, that fundamentally changed how I view my smart phone. Instead of calling our devices "phones," "tablets," or "computers," Pastor Chris challenged us to see them as DMDs—Digital Ministry Devices. That simple reframing posed a powerful question: What if every post and comment could become an opportunity to further the Gospel and minister to others?

As a senior communication major at the University of Dayton, I've studied how people connect in the digital age, the immense power we hold to reach others instantly, and the responsibility that comes with that power. The question facing Christians and churches today isn't whether to use social media, but how to use it faithfully. Can we truly redeem social media from the cesspool it often becomes?

I believe the answer is yes—but it requires intentionality, wisdom, and a commitment to let our faith shape our digital presence rather than allowing digital culture to shape our faith.

The opportunity before us

Social media presents the church with an unprecedented opportunity. Never before could a single believer share hope with thousands in an instant. Never before could a local congregation extend its ministry beyond its walls to reach the lonely, the searching, and the hurting at any hour.

The early church spread the Gospel through traveling teachers, written letters, and word of mouth in the marketplace. Today's "marketplace" includes digital communication, and our presence there matters. If we withdraw entirely, we abandon a mission field filled with people seeking meaning, connection, and hope.

Churches can share sermons, celebrate milestones, offer prayer, and extend welcome. Individual believers can witness through thoughtful comments, encouraging messages, and honest reflections of their faith journey.

The problem: The algorithm isn't neutral

The first step in redeeming social media is understanding the problem—and the problem isn't simply people; it's the platforms themselves. The algorithm shaping what we see is not neutral. Every scroll, click, and pause is tracked to predict what will keep us online longer. And what keeps us scrolling? Strong emotion—especially outrage, fear, and indignation.

In the spring 2025 semester, I took a course called "The History and Analysis of Propaganda." One key definition came from Jowett and O'Donnell (2011), who wrote that propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate

cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. Though written before today's social media dominance, this perfectly describes what algorithms do.

Each platform's goal is engagement, not enlightenment. The more we react, the more data they gather, and the more precisely they can feed us content that provokes another reaction. Outrage keeps us commenting. Fear keeps us refreshing. Division keeps us coming back for validation.

The result is a constant digital tug-of-war for our attention, emotions, and worldview. Without discernment, we risk being discipled more by algorithms than by Scripture. Before we can use social media for ministry, we must recognize that its default setting isn't formation in Christ, but manipulation for clicks.

When we recognize how our attention is being manipulated, we understand the spiritual cost of constantly scrolling. Sometimes the best response isn't to scroll smarter; it's to step away altogether. Closing the app can be an act of worship, a quiet declaration that our peace matters more than the platform's message. Stepping away allows us to reset our hearts, regain perspective, and remember that God calls us to be present in the real world, not perpetually provoked by the digital one.

The solution: Love God, love others.

When Jesus was asked which commandment mattered most, he answered clearly: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength," and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30–31). If love for God and love for others shaped every post, comment, and share, social media would become more than noise; it would become ministry. Consider these guidelines as we engage online:

1. Honor God in every post

Every click and comment reflects the state of our hearts. Before posting, ask: Does this honor God? Would I say this if Jesus were beside me? Our digital lives are an extension of our witness. When our words reflect the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—we remind others that grace can live even in a comment thread.

2. Listen more than you speak

Loving others online often looks like slowing down. Real ministry begins with compassion, not opinions. Take time to read what people share, notice when they're hurting, and respond with genuine care. Sometimes a private message means far more than a public post. When we listen well, we love well—and that love becomes light in the digital noise.

3. Protect the vulnerable

Love also means stewardship. As Christians, we're called to guard the vulnerable, especially children and youth who live so much of their lives online. Think carefully before sharing images or stories about them. Model digital discernment by valuing privacy and dignity over visibility and likes. When we protect others' safety and honor, we mirror the heart of a God who shelters His people.

Redeeming the Feed

If the algorithm is designed to stir outrage, then redemption begins when believers choose a different way. We cannot control what the feed shows us, but we can control what we feed into it. Every time we post with love for God and love for others, we push back against the culture of division and make space for the Gospel to breathe online.

Redemption won't happen by accident. Our devices are not the enemy; they are the opportunity. They can spread fear or faith, hostility or hope. The difference lies in the hands that hold them. When we see our phones as Digital Ministry Devices, every click becomes a chance to minister.

Pastor Chris's question still echoes: Will we see our devices merely as entertainment and communication tools—or as instruments of digital ministry?

The choice is ours, and the mission field is waiting.

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Editor's Notes

Your Church's New Front Door: Livestreaming and Other Technology

by Jeff Piepho

A RISKY PURCHASE

"Are they serious? How do they expect me to start a church with that?" I exclaimed to my wife, red-faced and angry. "We moved from California to Kansas for this?" I let the question hang in the air.

Our new church plant's budget would include no salary for me. No budget for a secretary. And instead of an expected six-figure budget, we'd be allowed just $10,000.

Never mind no pay—I picked up an outside job. But I wasn't sure how we'd buy a sound system for $10,000, much less launch an entire church and get all the equipment, marketing, and printing we needed. Still, forward we marched, carefully measuring every penny.

From then on, the twelve of us young, broke, and determined twenty-somethings, considered ourselves the MacGyvers of the church world. (MacGyver was a TV character known for staying calm under pressure, diffusing bombs, and building almost anything from scraps.)

"You need a new computer and a sound board? Give me some cotton balls, fishing line, and a screwdriver—I'll see what I can do," we'd joke.

We also knew that video was going to be crucial for the kind of church we were launching in 2004. Unfortunately, none of us could build a professional-quality camera out of scrap metal and shoelaces, so we had to make a purchase.

I found an eBay listing for the camera we needed: $2,500. That was 25 percent of our entire budget. I called the seller to make sure it wasn't a terrible idea.

"It's a great deal, man!" he exclaimed, sounding more criminal than comforting. "Trust me, man. Trust me."

I literally started sweating. Was I insane to invest this much in one camera?

Maybe your church doesn't have a massive tech budget or a team of volunteer Mac-Gyvers. But if you want to communicate the gospel effectively through technology, you have to commit to reaching people—whatever it takes. Church technology like livestreams, websites, and solid social media requires a long-game commitment to keep improving and to take a few risks, no matter your current budget.

And yes, you'll probably sweat a little as you question your sanity.

Bigger tech

Fast-forward twenty years, and our tech situation looks a little different.

We now have a dedicated livestream room that could pass for a TV broadcast studio. We use a mix of professional-grade tools and equipment to produce a high-quality live stream, websites, videos, and Sunday service production. That includes a Resi encoder, six or more professional video cameras, two high end sound boards, ridiculously expensive microphones, a massive lighting system, and multiple custom-built websites.

Any one of those categories now costs more than our entire church budget when we started. And our current in-house speaker system alone costs more than my first home. It still boggles my mind.

We've also had multiple staff members over the years whose jobs focused largely on video, social media, and tech. And today, our volunteer tech crew uses 15-20 people per Sunday just to run the Sunday morning live stream and in-house service.

The new front door

We started small. This didn't happen overnight—it took 20 years. We could've stayed simple, low quality, and low investment.

So why keep pouring so much money, time, and volunteer energy into the online experience and technology? Especially for us—we're not a wealthy church by any means.

Here's why: when a guest walks through what you think is your front door, they've already visited you. The first time you meet them isn't the first time they've met you.

If your church has a website, a Facebook page, or especially a livestream and videos, your guests have already been watching, learning, and getting to know you.

At Revolution Church we have a saying: "Our livestream is the front door of the church."

You have a new front door too—if you have a livestream. Your new foyer isn't bricks and mortar, it's your website. Your new sign out front isn't by the street corner, it's your social media.

I'll often introduce myself to someone new: "Hi, I'm Pastor Jeff!" And without missing a beat they'll reply, "We know—we've been watching online for a few months now." It happens so often that I don't even bat an eye anymore.

People's online lives are their real lives now. For most people looking for a church or feeling drawn to Jesus, they want to dip their toe in the water before committing. They want to know you're not one of those crazy churches they've heard about online. So, they pull open your livestream before you've ever met them.

Is your livestream the experience and quality you want a new guest to have?

Continued investment nets results

That's why we've continued to invest money, time, volunteer hours, and even staff into our livestream, website, social media, and video teams for twenty years.

Imagine this: your church is beautiful, your people are warm, and the Spirit of God is powerfully present. But when a guest arrives, the front door is rusted and falling off its hinges.

That's what a poor livestream is—a broken front door. A low-quality website is like having a moldy foyer with a creepy stranger staring at your guests. Irregularly updated social media is like a sign out front with the wrong service times.

On Sunday, we had 623 people in the building—and many hundreds more watching online. What they see online is what often invites them to step through the real

door.

If we didn't have a strong, high-quality online presence, it would seriously damage our ability to deliver the gospel.

The challenge

The challenge is that this takes real effort. There's a learning curve for volunteers as you bring in new technology. Finances have to be redirected from other areas. And it requires the courage to shut down some less important ministries (the ones that probably need to die anyway) to free up people's time and energy.

The temptation

The temptation is to get momentarily excited, rush out, and buy new technology that no one can actually use. That will just end up collecting dust in the corner of a closet while a deacon shakes his head at your next impulsive buy. Another temptation is to launch a livestream before your volunteers are ready to handle it with quality and care.

If you're interested in livestreams, lighting, and sound systems, look for a solid AV integrator—like Solid Rock AV near us in Kansas. A good AV integrator can help you design the right kind of livestream system, no matter what your current budget is.

If you want your website to be purposeful and powerful—rather than a random collection of well-intentioned volunteer's ideas—don't rely on cheap web hosts like Wix or Squarespace. Find a professional full-stack web developer who specializes in churches, like my own Piepho Multimedia.

And if you want great social media, dedicate a high-level volunteer to building a team and have them take online tutorials (Skillshare is a great place to start) on creating engaging videos and posts that actually connect with people. Places like Church Candy can also help you market on social media to get guests.

Gospel-centered

But more than any of that—keep your church gospel centered.

There will always be new technologies. The amount of change over the last twenty years can't even be defined. But as the Apostle Paul said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

Ultimately, we'll do whatever it takes. Again, Paul wrote, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

We're not technology-driven because the gospel is good. We're gospel-driven, and technology—like livestreams—is simply the tool of our time.

The risk is worth it

Twenty years ago, we took the risk of betting 25 percent of our entire budget on one little video camera. As I prepare to baptize seven more people this Sunday (a celebration we now experience every month) I can't help but think that risk paid off.

The front door of our church is wide open. Make sure your front door is huge, easy to open, and beautiful. Invest the time and money. Let it shout, "We have hope!" Because we, the Church, are the only ones who know the name of Hope: Jesus Christ.

Jeff Piepho is lead pastor at Revolution Church, a Brethren in Christ congregation in Salina, KS.

Five Simple Ways Your Church Can Upgrade Communication Without Breaking the Bank

1. **Start with what matters most: audio.**
   I bought a camera first—but looking back, I think differently. Before you even think about video, make sure your audio is clean with good cables and is properly setup in the sound board. Eliminate hums, clicks, and pops. A poor video with great audio is usable, but a great video with bad audio is worthless.

2. **Build a tech team, not just a tech person.**
   Don't rely on one individual (or couple) to carry the load. The pastor needs to drive the vision that livestreams matter, but there also needs to be a dedicated tech leader—and that leader needs a team willing to put in training time.

3. **Leverage affordable help.**
   Your church doesn't have to figure it all out alone. There are services that can mix your band's audio live. A Skillshare subscription or similar platform can give your team the training they need to grow quickly. AV integrators can advise you.

4. **Upgrade one piece at a time—and never quit.**
   Can't afford better lighting? Start with a better preaching mic. Then save for the lights. Don't think you need $500,000 today. Just move forward a bit at a time. It took us twenty years, but I doubt we ever went more than six months without some kind of upgrade.

5. **Review regularly.**
   Regularly evaluate your livestream, website, and social media. You'll spot problems before they grow. What's worse than not having an online presence is having an outdated or sloppy one.

Creatively Communicating the Gospel

By Donald Shenk

IN THE EARLY 1930s, Rev. Charlie Byers, a Brethren in Christ pastor and later a bishop, officially responded to God's call into Christian ministry in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Rev. Byers was a gifted communicator who was passionate about sharing the gospel and leading others to place their faith in Jesus. Initially, the only way Rev. Byers could verbally fulfill his passion and exert spiritual influence on people outside of his own congregation was by traveling extensively to speak at revival meetings and evangelistic campaigns, but that changed when a radio station was built in Chambersburg.

When word spread that Chambersburg was getting its first radio station, some of Charlie's parishioners encouraged him to start a radio program, and one couple even pledged to cover expenses for the first year. Consequently, when WCHA started broadcasting on Sunday, August 11, 1946, Charlie had booked airtime and was in the studio that morning to begin preaching the gospel over the airwaves. Now Charlie had the potential to preach God's truth into the hearts of anyone within fifty miles of Chambersburg who had a radio. Charlie named his program The Gospel Tide Hour, taken from the title of his theme song, "Let the Gospel Tide Roll In."

Over the next two decades, as doors opened and finances permitted, Charlie began airing The Gospel Tide Hour on more stations across America. This expansion created the need for greater organization and manpower. Volunteers were recruited, a Board of Directors was formed, and in 1963 The Gospel Tide Hour radio ministry was formally incorporated as The Gospel Tide Broadcasting Association. During that same era, Trans World Radio (TWR) was founded and began constructing short wave broadcasting facilities to reach into other nations. Charlie accepted the invitation from TWR to air The Gospel Tide Hour across southern Africa where English was widely understood. Without leaving Chambersburg, Charlie became an international evangelist sharing God's truth with listeners

thousands of miles away.

A key turning point came in 1978 when The Gospel Tide Broadcasting Association established Good News Hour as a partner ministry in India. This included a change from English to Hindi language gospel content in the voice of an indigenous speaker. It also marked the beginning of a transition from a domestic radio program into an international media ministry.

In 2008, the decision was made to stop producing English programs and focus entirely on international partnerships, producing gospel content for people in regions with limited access to God's Word. Since then, The Tide® Ministry has partnered with local believers in multiple countries, equipping them to share the gospel in the languages people were born to speak. The current portfolio includes active ministry partnerships in fourteen countries distributing gospel media in thirty-five languages.

It has been said that Charlie embraced the cutting edge of technology in his efforts to share the gospel. The Tide® Ministry strives to emulate that same spirit of innovation. As technology advances, we are modernizing operations and adopting new means of spreading the good news about Jesus. Our current mission is to be creatively sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ worldwide through media and partnerships. Our goal is to provide gospel content in whatever media is most accessible to, or preferred by, our target audience.

However, even as new forms of media have been integrated, radio often remains relevant. In particular, shortwave radio plays a large role in getting the gospel into countries that are closed or opposed to Christianity because it can cover large areas and cross borders that are often closed to missionaries. The Good News Hour studio in India currently records and produces radio programs in twelve languages that are sent to TWR to be aired across India, Nepal, and Bhutan from external shortwave transmitters in places like Guam and Sri Lanka. The continued effectiveness of shortwave is demonstrated by the

increasing number of people responding to the broadcasts each year. During the first quarter of 2022 an average of 1100 listeners responded each month. That number has been steadily growing and by the second quarter of 2025 had risen to 1,958.

Like shortwave, the internet freely crosses borders and has the added benefit of being able to reach anywhere in the world where the technology is available. This has enabled some of our partners to significantly broaden their reach. Our Albanian radio pastor has been able to connect with online listeners from the Albanian diaspora in multiple countries and now also shepherds a fledgling church in France that grew out of his interactions with online listeners.

The global internet has also created new avenues for sharing the gospel. The annual budgets for many of The Tide® ministry partners now make provision for a web-based outreach or social media coordinator.

In Zimbabwe, Amagugu Evangeli continues to produce a weekly radio program, but also engages with people daily through social media and messaging apps. Their most recent report indicates that they now have almost three thousand WhatsApp subscribers to their daily devotionals, 4,755 Facebook followers, and over 45,000 views of their short form inspirational content on TikTok. These platforms generate instant feedback and discussion, and can also be forwarded to others, effectively extending their impact.

Producing and distributing media content only has impact when it can be accessed by the intended audience. Unfortunately, people living in poverty in disadvantaged communities often don't have the means to access the messages of hope and salvation that we are broadcasting. To overcome this hurdle, The Tide Ministry endeavors to provide radios and media players where practical. Our boots on the ground in India have found this to be an effective means of planting churches. Team members will take a radio into a village and invite residents to listen to the radio with them. After each listening session, the ministry worker moderates a time

of discussion to answer questions, provide additional teaching, and offer the invitation for participants to become followers of Christ. At least twenty-seven Brethren in Christ congregations in India can trace their roots back to beginning as a listening club!

Our Life's Answers partners in Thailand have incorporated small solar-powered media players into their church planting and discipleship strategy. These hand-held devices can be loaded with scripture, pre-recorded radio programs, and additional teaching. This enables recipients to listen anytime, as often as they want to, and has proven to be a very effective means of leading people deeper into Christian faith.

An additional advantage of portable media players is that they are not affected when hostile governments attempt to jam Christian radio and TV signals, ban social media platforms, or shut down public internet access.

We marvel at how God took the seed he planted in Rev. Charlie Byers's heart and nurtured it into a flourishing multifaceted global media outreach. Much has changed since 1946, and perhaps more changes will occur in the coming years, but the purpose and mission of The Tide Ministry remains steadfast. Amidst the diversity of media formats, people groups, countries and languages enveloped in The Tide® ministry, we are committed to making it possible for as many people as possible to know that Jesus loves them, speaks their language, and desires to be invited into their lives.

Donald Shenk is executive director of The Tide®, based in Chambersburg, PA.

The Unique Power of Digital Storytelling

By James Yutzy

THE CONVERSATION USUALLY starts like this: "I've heard God has been moving in your life in some amazing ways. Would you be willing to share a bit of what has been happening with the church through a video?" Sometimes, the answer comes quickly and joyfully: "Absolutely!" Other times, there's hesitation, a quiet pause, or even a nervous laugh. But most often the response includes some kind of disbelief that their story might have an impact on someone else's life. For me, as people have been willing, albeit reluctantly, to sit opposite my cameras, I have realized that learning to hear the persistent presence of the Holy Spirit through an individual's lived experience is one of the biggest joys of my life. I have sat with people who have shared about their heart and their faith as they received a terminal brain cancer diagnosis, or how they have navigated the tragic loss of a loved one, or even how they have fought with addiction and have received healing by the grace of God.

For years now, we have sought to prioritize sharing stories of transformation with the church through the medium of digital storytelling. This includes taking a truck full of several cameras, microphones, lighting rigs, miles of cables, all of the plugs and batteries we can carry to someone's home and setting up a makeshift studio in their living room with the specific goal of allowing them to be positioned in the best possible figurative and actual light so their story can point to the hopefulness of the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. After hitting record and letting the cameras roll for forty-five minutes to an hour of powerful, vulnerable, and sometimes tear-filled honesty, the footage is then edited to a three to four minute video focusing on one specific storyline of their journey. The goal is to work with great care and intentionality to minimize distractions so that the life-changing work of Jesus can be communicated clearly, simply, and powerfully through a specific experience of the storyteller.

While this is not the only way to share the stories of life change with our community, I have come to realize that this approach does several things. First, digital storytelling can be a language that reveals the active work of the Holy Spirit in someone's life. All around us we are steeped in the language of digital media and storytelling. From Netflix, to Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, the 24-hour news cycle, advertisements, and more—it is always on and always updating the flow of endless digital information across nearly every domain of life. We have found that as we use the language of digital media to point to the resurrected Jesus with intention, the community resonates differently than having the person be interviewed on a Sunday morning or sharing the story in the context of a sermon. Thoughtful, intentional, and strategic usage of the medium of digital media is essentially one of the most effective ways of conveying information in this cultural moment; it is working to speak the language of the people to the people. As we increasingly become a digital society, a new language of communication is created that Jesus can use to bring redemption to the broken world.

Another fascinating thing I have learned is that digital storytelling amplifies a personal story by transforming it from an individual experience into a shared encounter that has the ability to transcend time. What may begin as a piece of one person's testimony has the ability to impact others by inviting them to reflect, connect, and consider what God might be speaking into their own lives. As I sit across from someone, I ask them in several ways to connect their experience with an emotion and an imagination of how God has shown up in that instance.

This has a powerful impact on the listener because even though the listener might not have navigated the same experience that is being reflected on, they have certainly experienced the emotion of the situation. And in that moment, hearing how the goodness of God shows up, has shown up, and will show up again has a profound impact on the listener and on their imagination of what God might be doing in their own lives. Time

and again I am moved to tears as I record, edit, and watch these stories because they impact my personal faith journey. I am humbled to be encouraged, uplifted, and challenged by the testimony of someone else. Over the years, I've gone back and watched videos from seasons past, and they still carry a similar impact. This is not because they're tied to a specific moment in time, but because they connect so well to the real life situations of people seeking to understand and follow Jesus.

It is not uncommon to invest over 20-25 hours into creating a piece that has a run-length of 3-4 minutes. While digital storytelling takes a great deal of work and effort, this approach to communication ultimately values simplicity by letting the heart of the storyteller shine through. That is the goal of highlighting testimonies of God's faithfulness—to get rid of all the distractions so that the love of Christ is clearly seen. If you'd like to see any of these testimonies and examples, visit: tmh.church/stories.

In the end, all I am doing is articulating the love of God through a language that resonates clearly with a specific audience and culture. I hope to create an avenue by which that the Spirit of God might convict and connect with the listener. It is my encouragement for all of us to discern how we might continue to use our gifts and resources to use different and digital avenues of communication so that more might hear and respond to the good news of the gospel.

James Yutzy is associate pastor at The Meeting House, Carlisle, PA.

Artificial Intelligence with a Healthy Dose of Digital Humility

By Rachel Jasitt and Sarah K. Myers

AS THE OLD old hymn proclaims, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love." How can we use technology, and specifically artificial intelligence (AI), to communicate God's love more fully, widely, and graciously? With a few clicks on a keyboard or taps on a screen, a seemingly infinite scope of information is at our fingertips and it should be able to help us communicate more robustly than ever before.

Communication has been shaped by various technologies throughout history from the invention of written language, paper, the printing press, telephones, and up to the internet and our modern technologies today. With the move to increased communication in online spaces, some may bemoan the breakdown of true connection this offers while others praise the ways it has brought many closer together and has provided increased accessibility. While there are differing feelings on communication via the internet at large, a new player has entered the scene with the means to once again shape how we communicate—AI.

Merriam Webster defines artificial intelligence (AI) as "the capability of computer systems or algorithms to imitate intelligent human behavior." While the concept of AI has become more commonplace in the past few years, it has been around longer than people may think. One example of a familiar AI is predictive text, when your phone or email guesses the next word or phrase that you will use while typing a message.

To be more specific, generative AI is what has more recently become popular. There are various generative AI chatbots and tools, such as Copilot and Gemini, but one of the most commonly known is ChatGPT. ChatGPT is one example of a Large Language Model (LLM) that works by ingesting and analyzing billions of records from the internet to learn patterns and rules of language, in order to provide responses in the ways of human speech. These generative AI tools are not only limited to text formats but they can also generate photos, videos, and even audio. Some Christian denominations have even used AI to develop Christian chatbots that can give information or encouragement from the lens of a particular denomination or tradition.[1]

Interacting with AI tools can be like chatting with a personal assistant to complete a task or asking a friend for advice. There's no particular format or required technology skills involved. When you ask a question, it will provide a response trying to match the tone and intention you set. As with almost any tool, AI can be used for both good and bad and there are various implications to consider. Some helpful uses of AI include asking a chatbot to supply ideas to spark creativity about a certain topic, organize travel itineraries, and even asking for recipes based on ingredients that are already on hand. It's a timesaver for drafting better emails and organizing lists, as well.

However, these interactions are not without ethical considerations. One impact of generative AI is that it requires an enormous amount of energy to train the tools to become better at responding and water to maintain the cooling systems at AI data centers.[2] Another ethical dilemma with generative AI is that it can be biased in the responses it gives. Chatbots are shaped by the content they receive and they only regurgitate the content they are fed back to new users. A user must be aware of the limitations of these tools' perspectives. They can too easily create an echo chamber where only one viewpoint or side is represented rather than the full breadth of a topic.[3] What remains important is the use of critical thinking when approaching AI. Although AI may seem to do the thinking for you, do not lose your own brain in the process.

So then, what effect does AI have on our communities and how does it shape our communication? With so many technologies, there is optimism that the future will be

better because of it. Alongside the possible ideas mentioned above, there are opportunities to use AI to enhance communication and connection. Practically, it can make our world a more accessible place for the differently abled. AI creates closed captions and transcripts; for the visually impaired it audibly describes the world in detail. It translates text and audio with great precision for non-native speakers just as easily as it can adjust the reading level of text for audiences of all ages and abilities. Accessibility can bring us closer together and allow for enhanced communication.

There are also valid concerns that the isolation of our computer screens is easily masked as community and companionship.[4] It's easy for many to use AI chatbots as a friend, a therapist, or even as a spiritual leader. However, there is no replacement for real interactions. Our world is a better and more vibrant place for having each of us engaged in it. Always turning to AI for answers is also likely to lead to an echo chamber where we are only receiving responses from the chatbot that agree with our views and not challenging us to think beyond them. This can be dangerous because it becomes easier to villainize those who do not agree with our exact beliefs. Communicating with humans who have a diversity of thoughts and experiences and learning how to disagree well with others is an important part of a dynamic society and is vital to our work as Christians in reconciliation.

Like so much that you might read online or see on television, it's important to be aware of tactics for misrepresenting or deliberately spreading falsehoods. AI can also be used for harmful schemes such as faking audio, text, or video to imitate someone you know as a way of exhorting money. Information now requires verification, so if you're unsure of the source or intent of digital content that you view online, see if you can find a second or third source to confirm its validity. You, dear reader, are smarter than any AI tool! Once you have the know-how to be aware and identify reliable information, then AI can be a useful resource for enhancing your communication skills. Consider your use of AI with a healthy dose of digital humility. When in doubt, be willing to admit what we don't know and seek truth in community. Escape your digital or situational biases and talk to a friend, spiritual leader, or information professional, such as a librarian. A new perspective may be refreshing.

In the past century, consider all the innovations in communicating. Radios, motion pictures, and TVs have all aroused concern and debate over their perceived worldliness and whether they could promote virtues of godliness. We believe that there's one constant, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the way we interact and communicate, but how we use it is key. Consider the possibilities of digital communication and AI as one additional tool in your toolbox. Don't forsake the community around and available to you, but rather, use this tool as a means to build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). God's love hasn't changed and our need for communion with him and others remains constant, regardless of the ever changing technology.

Notes

[1]Zac Koons, "The priesthood of all chatbots?," *The Christian Century*, August 14, 2025). https://www.christiancentury.org/features/priesthood-all-chatbots.

[2]Mahmut Kandemir, "Why AI uses so much energy—and what we can do about it, Penn State Institute of Energy and the Environment, September 8, 2025, https://iee.psu.edu/news/blog/why-ai-uses-so-much-energy-and-what-we-can-do-about-it.

[3]J. Ryan Fuller, "The Artificial Chatbot Echo Chamber Is Far Too Real," *Psychology Today,* August 19, 2025, 4ttps://tinyurl.com/3mxry24f.

[4]" Emily Brown, The Church's AI Dilemma Is Just Beginning, " *Relevant,* May 29, 2025, https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/tech-gaming/the-churchs-ai-dilemma-is-just-beginning/.

Rachel Jasitt and Sarah K. Myers are librarians at Messiah University, Mechanicsburg, PA. This year, the librarians are exploring AI, its functionality in library resources, and its relationship to the academic experience in Christian higher education for students and educators.

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hawked on street corners sold for pennies.

In chapter four, Winchester takes us into the maze of the manipulation of knowledge, into propaganda, and the questions of what news is trustworthy. While war propaganda may be easier to spot, he introduces us to food propaganda and the field of public relations that while considered a legitimate profession can also be seen as a "rebranded form of propaganda." Chapter five addresses the function of technology to think for us and whether or not this will diminish our ability to think for ourselves. We use calculators to navigate math and GPS to find the way to our vacation destination. Is something lost when we don't multiply for ourselves or read and use a map? Chapter six addresses wisdom. In the prologue, wisdom was at the top of the pyramid and differentiated from mere data or information or knowledge. He questions whether it is wise to define what "wise" may mean but then says, "Wisdom is the highest state of mental acuity to which a sentient human being can aspire" unless, he says, one classifies a Buddhist idea of enlightenment as higher.

Knowing What We Know highlights how people transmit knowledge. People tell people things. Winchester recounts fascinating human stories of global and historic interest connecting us to those who have lived before us and in other places and cultures. This is a book that helps us to know more, think more, and maybe even be more wise. And, hopefully, as Confucius says, more humble.

Lois Saylor is a member of the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church and an editorial advisor for Shalom!.

BOOK REVIEW: Knowing and Telling: A Human Story

By Lois Saylor

THE TRANSMISSION OF human knowledge or communication is summed up simply in Simon Winchester's book, *Knowing What We Know: The Knowledge from Ancient Wisdom to Modern Magic.* In the prologue he writes, "People tell people things." It's a fun phrase and can hardly be argued, but then he spends 380 pages explaining how people have told other people things from oral tradition to Wikipedia and questions a future world of knowing and telling.

The prologue, before addressing how we transmit knowledge, asks, "What is knowledge?" An interesting discussion of experience and belief and credible justifications ensues with the note that the Greek "logos" has been used as "a logical justification for believing the notion to be true." (To which I had to think, "Jesus, the logos, is the logical justification for believing that God exists." Jesus as "logical justification.")

From Socrates and Plato to the modern-day thinkers the idea of defining knowledge as JTB or "justified true belief" has been discussed, debated, and refined. More recently the letters have been used meaning data, information, knowledge, and wisdom with data at the bottom of a pyramid ascending to information, then knowledge, and finally to wisdom. This pyramid graphic

acknowledges the difference between these descriptive knowledge words and how they relate to what we discern.

In the next six chapters, Winchester takes us on a wide-ranging history of communication spanning millennia and the globe. What Winchester knows and imparts to the reader is rather astounding. But he begins by writing, "The teaching of children . . . is where the story of transfer of knowledge truly begins." So, the first chapter covers what various ancient cultures taught their children and how they taught. Writing, of course, was a hinge point in history affecting teaching and how knowledge was transferred: "In four quite separated places around the planet, and over an extended period of around two thousand years that began around 3400 BC, the craft of writing was invented." Along with the importance of writing, he speaks to the philosophy of education and knowledge in various times and cultures. He quotes Confucius saying, "Knowledge makes humble. Ignorance makes proud." Perhaps a reminder to check ourselves on our pride in our own knowledge or education.

Chapter two discusses how humanity keeps knowledge safe and secure through museums, libraries, books, and encyclopedias, and eventually the internet. He bridges the time gap from the ancient to the modern

by telling us our virtual assistant "Alexa" was named after the ancient Alexandrian library, as both are/were ways to access massive information. These collective places or spaces of knowledge also eventually brought with them the "democratization of knowledge." Knowledge was no longer the domain of the rich who only educated their sons perpetuating class systems.

The next chapter speaks to the intentionality and effort of passing on knowledge. In China, the invention of paper encouraged and boosted the very idea of writing things down. And, of course, the movable-type printing press allowed for even more ways of disseminating information resulting eventually in the ubiquitous newspaper, a word which literally describes itself—the news on paper. With this also came the idea that "knowledge can thus be commodified for distribution around the world." We could now sell knowledge which brought us into the emerging "global village" and "nowhere was far away anymore."

The democratization of knowledge kept increasing as access was greater and cheaper. A Guttenberg Bible at the time of printing cost thirty florins or one third of a well-paid person's yearly salary, but soon a newspaper