

Blue Book Report

Task Force for Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism

Members

Adams, Mr. Walker - West Missouri, VII
Knisely, The Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas - Rhode Island, I
Cowgill, Mr. Benjamin - Southwestern Virginia, III
Doyle, The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew - Texas, VII
Felice, Ms. Beth - Missouri, V
Giraldo, The Rev. Edgar - Litoral Ecuador, IX
Gortner, The Rev. David - Virginia Theological Seminary
Lytle, Dr. Julie - Massachusetts, I
McKellar, Ms. Andrea - South Carolina, IV
Pacyniak, Mx. Kori - San Diego, VIII
Pankey, The Rev. Steven - Kentucky, IV

Curry, The Most Rev. Michael - Ex Officio - North Carolina, IV
Jennings, The Rev. Gay Clark - Ex Officio - Ohio, V
Powell, Ms. Holli - Liaison of Executive Council - Lexington, IV
Tackett, Mr. Jeremy Staff n/a

Changes in Membership

There were three changes to the Task Force's membership during the triennium.
The Rev. Jake Dell was replaced by the Rev. Steven Pankey
Mr. Randall Curtis was replaced by Ms. Andrea McKellar
The Rev. Sara Shisler Goff was replaced by the Rev. David Gortner

Mandate

A172 (2015) Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 78th General Convention create a Task Force of three bishops, three presbyters or deacons and six lay persons to develop two curricula – one for clergy and one for lay people – for the purpose of leveraging social media for evangelism; and be it further Resolved, That the Task Force develop the curricula in consultation with seminary deans, marketing professionals, and others with knowledge of evangelism and social media; and be it further Resolved, That the Task Force develop these curricula by the second year of the upcoming triennium and make them available by the third year, and that the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society regularly evaluate the curricula to ensure they are current; and be it further Resolved, That the Task Force work with the Development Office of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society to seek funds for this project, including the necessary staff or consultants to oversee this work.

Summary of Work

The task force began its work in November of 2015 wrestling with its mandate. What should the scope of a curriculum be? How do we define social media? How do we define evangelism? Does this small group even have the authority to define such a term for the whole church?

Guided by the motivation of the resolution author, the Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas Knisely, "to let people know the power of peace in their lives by an encounter with Jesus," the task force came to agree that our goal was to teach people to be evangelists and to use social media more effectively. This vision presumes that individuals and communities both understand their baptismal call as members of the Body of Christ to be witnesses to their faith in how they live their lives and to proclaim their faith by spreading the Good News in an explicit ways. We determined that there should be one curriculum that expresses how all the baptized are called to be evangelists and that reminds each member of the body that their role/position/function carries different responsibilities for determining how to appropriately express themselves online.

Five learning outcomes emerged identifying that at the end of their participation in the curriculum, individuals and communities will be able to:

- Communicate via social media their experience of God's transforming love (empower digital storytellers),
- Communicate their personal/communal "why" for doing this work (theological foundations, social media theory, understanding of evangelism, ground in baptismal commitment),
- Identify, evaluate and appropriately use social media technologies (message, method, then media)
- Identify and set appropriate boundaries based on role/position/function (lay, church professional, clergy)
- Differentiate needs/methods for communication by generation (millennials, generation X, boomer)

We agreed that we wanted to produce a multimedia curriculum that included a glossary of terms, incorporated already available information from reputable sources like the Pew Internet and Social Life Center, and linked to current resources including social media policies already developed by dioceses and church-wide organizations. We hoped to design a highly adaptable program using print, podcasts, video productions, and interactive modules that could be used as a series of shorter events like adult forums, a weekend retreat, or through self-directed learning. We planned to tap familiar platforms as well as popular distribution networks.

Four subcommittees met to discuss identifying resources, finding funding, designing the curriculum, and writing a theology white paper. A short survey was drafted for later refinement; a timeline for curriculum development and testing at church-wide gatherings was developed; and a budget for presentation to the Executive Council was drafted before the task force adjourned.

It was decided that what was needed was a survey of the church's relationship with social media and with evangelism and that gathering such data would be a worthwhile task while

Presiding Bishop Curry worked to create his new staff which would include a Canon for Racial Reconciliation and Evangelism.

The survey was distributed to the church and yielded informative comments and data from the 800 participants in English and 48 in Spanish. It showed that while people are comfortable using social media platforms, they do not feel comfortable, authorized, or empowered to evangelize using these platforms. Many of the respondents noted a desire for a “how to craft my story” type guide or examples of the testimonies of others. Many commented about the need for being respectful of others space and a fear that they would be offending others by sharing their faith. Throughout the survey, a tension around what the word “evangelism” means developed. Is it “sharing one’s story” or “spelling out systematic theology?” The survey confirmed for our group that while Episcopalians need technical help around the use of social media platforms, we first need to help the church understand what evangelism is and isn’t, and help people develop a comfort around what is a fearful subject for many.

After the survey, our work did not progress as quickly as our mandate intended. There were changes to the makeup of the task force and new Evangelism Office staff members were hired. Once the group was reconstituted, it divided into two sub-groups, one to tackle the theology of evangelism and one group to form that work, alongside other materials, into a curriculum.

Curriculum Group

Mr. Walker Adams

Mr. Benjamin Cowgill

Ms. Beth Felice

The Rev. Edgar Giraldo

Dr. Julie Lytle

Ms. Andrea McKellar

Theology Group

The Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas Knisely

The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle

The Rev. David Gortner

Mx. Kori Pacyniak

The Rev. Steven Pankey

The Theology Group submitted a paper outlining the theological case for evangelism in a digital space (Addendum A). The Curriculum Group then held another in-person meeting in January 2016 to break down the theology into workable curriculum modules.

The committee designed 8 modules:

- What is Evangelism
- Why Evangelism
- Permission Granted
- How to share stories

- What is Social Media
- Entering a Digital World
- How to share your story online
- How to use social media (Best Practices)

At the submission of this blue book report, the attached theology paper has helped shape some of the language being used by the evangelism team at the revivals being held around the church. The curriculum group has taken the paper and other materials and shaped them together into a curriculum that is currently with The Episcopal Church's Office of Communications for editing and video production.

At the writing of this report, we have used little of our budget and those costs have gone to holding the two face-to-face meetings, and interpretation services for our multilingual group. It is anticipated that most, if not all, of our remaining funds will be used by the evangelism staff on the production of video content to accompany the written curriculum.

The group would like to offer several comments to the convention and its leadership. First, we strongly encourage the convention to allocate more money for in person gatherings. While much work can be accomplished online, it is very hard to establish group dynamics that way. We found ourselves much more productive when we were physically gathered together and away from the distractions of our daily lives. This is especially true when multiple languages are being used in a committee.

Second, we encourage The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society to explore other online meeting platforms besides Adobe Connect, with specific attention to VOIP. A number of our meetings ended up being canceled, significantly delayed, or were totally isolating to members of our group due to language and translation issues caused by the meeting platform. Our task force ultimately ended up abandoning Adobe Connect in favor of Zoom which freed a phone line for a translator to use for simultaneous translation.

Finally, we wish to thank the convention for the opportunity to work on this project. We are greatly encouraged by the participation in our survey and acknowledge the church's hunger for knowledge and tools for evangelism and living in the digital age. It has been a pleasure to work with the Presiding Bishop's staff in creating these materials.

Respectfully submitted,
Task Force for Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism

Resolutions

Title: An Episcopal Theology of Evangelism

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 79th General Convention commend to Provincial and Diocesan leadership the White Paper, "A Practical Theology of Episcopal Evangelism: Face-to-Face and in Cyberspace" written by the General Convention Task Force for Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism.

Title: Training for [Digital] Evangelists

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 79th General Convention convey to the Office of the Presiding Bishop's Canon for Evangelism and Racial Reconciliation the desire that the curriculum started by the General Convention Task Force for Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism be brought to its completion in this coming triennium; and be it further

Resolved, That said curriculum be utilized as part of The Episcopal Church's ongoing work of training evangelists, both face-to-face and digital evangelists, in preparation for Revivals and most especially in those places where a Revival may not be possible due to size, logistics, and other considerations so that [digital] evangelists are trained to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with traditionally underserved populations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Office of the Presiding Bishop's Canon for Evangelism and Racial Reconciliation explore the mutual benefit of developing relationships with para-Church organization such as Forma, the Episcopal Evangelism Society, and Episcopal Communicators to provide such training to other trainers whose reach might allow for the expansion of Episcopal Evangelists throughout the Church, with the goal of having a trained-, licensed [digital] evangelist in every Diocese by the end of the Triennium; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request that the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance consider a budget allocation of \$100,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Addendum

A Practical Theology of Episcopal Evangelism: Face-to-Face and in Cyberspace

Steve Pankey, Andy Doyle, David Gortner, Nick Knisely and Stephanie Spellers

Members of the Task Force on Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism

No matter the context: evangelism is evangelism. Our call to share the Good News does not go away when we log on to Facebook or Instagram. Whether we're sitting at dinner with a friend or streaming on Facebook Live, we have the opportunity to follow the Holy Spirit's invitation into a joyful, surprising adventure that changes us as much as it changes the people and communities we encounter. We are braving the wilderness, taking our faith into the public square, seeking the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, naming God's awakening presence, bearing and sharing our own stories of God's goodness, owning and offering God's great story, and blessing and joining with God's restoration project, already in progress.

The Holy Spirit has always moved out ahead of apostles in this way. The church in Jerusalem could not contain, plan or direct the movement of the living Word of God—it spread like running water, like trails of fire, through eddies and channels of relationships in homes and in the marketplace and across Roman society. That first wildfire of Pentecost in Acts 2 gives us a picture of the public square come alive, infused everywhere with new stories, ideas, passion and hope—fluid in movement, hopping across barriers of language and culture and class and group. So it is with us today. We cannot limit the gospel to the walls of the church or the work of the ordained. Every Christian everywhere bears this calling, to practice seeking where God is moving, celebrating God's stirring grace, and joining in God's work in that place and time.

Following that movement means we have to retire a few notions. Chief among them: the false dichotomy between face-to-face and online communication. After all, the church's most important welcome mat may now be its website. Ask anyone raised in the era of Facebook and Instagram, and they'll tell you just how powerful, intimate, authentic and even holy their social-media mediated relationships can be. Some of us can hardly imagine genuinely sharing faith online, much less growing it, but God is constantly working God's purposes out in the world, and God will do it wherever people gather. The more we notice the thru-line that connects engaging in worship, walking about in daily life, having dinner with friends, or snapping and chatting on Snapchat, the more we can live into our vocation as good news-bearers in the world.

Together, members of the Task Force for Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism have spent more than a year surveying, studying and reflecting on just what it takes to help Episcopalians – or any people of faith – to embrace the World Wide Web as a mission frontier. People told us they need practical tools and intentional spaces for experiential learning. They also admitted they could use an updated primer on just what is evangelism and how to practice it as faithful,

humble, respectful Christians. This paper and the accompanying curriculum address those needs by exploring:

- A definition of Episcopal evangelism
- The link between technology and sharing faith
- Key principles for leveraging social media for evangelism

Is evangelism somehow different when you practice it in cyberspace? No. Has evangelism fundamentally changed from the core Christian ministry the apostles and ancients have handed down to us? No. But the world within which we live this calling is constantly changing. It's time to follow the God whose love and yearning knows no bounds and no limits.

Practical Theology of Evangelism

For Episcopalians today, evangelism is front and center. At the 78th General Convention in 2015, Presiding Bishop-Elect Michael Curry promised he would serve as our church's C.E.O.: the Chief Evangelism Officer. He knew he couldn't do it on his own; he shared a vision of a whole church freshly oriented toward the proclamation and embodiment of the good news of Jesus Christ. A church firmly rooted in the baptismal promises to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself" and "to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ." A church that takes seriously the definition of our very reason for being, as detailed in the Outline of the Faith (also known as the Catechism):

Q: What is the mission of the Church?

A: The Church's mission is to restore all people to unity with God and each other through Christ.

We do not exist for ourselves. We exist for the sake of the movement Jesus launched some two millennia ago, a movement to help the whole world to grow loving, liberating and life-giving relationships with God, with each other, and with creation.

What Evangelism Is ...

Evangelism is one of the most important ministries in the life of the Jesus Movement, because this is where we focus on walking with our neighbors and communities as they develop their own loving, liberating, life-giving relationships with God. Over the years, Episcopalians have defined evangelism in various ways:

- **Scripture:** From *evangélion* (Greek): gospel, glad tidings or good news
The resurrected Jesus appears and the first words to his disciples are: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." Mark 16:15
- **Tradition:** Baptismal Covenant (Book of Common Prayer, 850)

Presider: “Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?”

Candidate: “I will, with God’s help.”

- **Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism (2009):** “Evangelism is sharing the love of Christ and the good news of God’s actions in our lives – the good news of the kingdom coming to life among us – in the language of the people, so that people can become disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Here is a practical definition collectively crafted by members of the Presiding Bishop’s Evangelism Initiatives Team, the Task Force for Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism, and many other partners: **We seek, name, and celebrate Jesus’ loving presence in the stories of all people – then invite everyone to MORE. #EpiscopalEvangelism**

Note the definition is the length of a tweet – that’s not an accident. Of course there’s plenty more to say about evangelism, but we also think evangelism is best practiced when it’s attentive to the language and modes real people use to communicate.

Now, with that as our frame, let’s unpack the tweet-length definition of Episcopal evangelism. “Episcopal evangelism: Seeking, naming, and celebrating God’s goodness in stories from our lives and others’ lives, and inviting people to MORE.”

Episcopal evangelism. These two words, for far too long, have not been seen together. But we as a Church are now moving beyond our long-term allergic reaction to the word “evangelism.” Episcopal evangelism begins with our presumptive beliefs in the deep, fundamental goodness of God’s creation and that God is already at work in every human life and in every setting. We do not go out as sole light-bearers to a world that only knows darkness. We go out always a hundred steps behind the Holy Spirit who is already moving in people’s lives -- and so, we go out as light-seekers and light-discoverers, ready to seek and serve Christ in all people and to name where we see God’s hand at work.

Episcopal evangelism is not some heavy-handed duty. It is not a tool, and it is not merely for use to get us more people as converts, church members, or pledging units. At its heart, Episcopal evangelism is a spiritual practice, at once active and receptive. When we do it, we embody the very life and practice of Jesus in the world (active). And we are filled with the Spirit and formed ever more into the likeness of Christ (receptive).

Episcopal evangelism is a joyful sharing of what you know to be good news and deep truth, and a celebration of how you see God at work in others’ lives and in the world. It wells up from the experience of God’s love poured out for us and into us, so much love it can’t help but overflow from us in story and celebration.

This makes Episcopal evangelism quite different from some of the more unfortunate ideas that have attached to it over the years. For instance, we do not “measure” evangelism by outcomes. Evangelism does not mask an agenda devoted to church growth, conversion or coercion. It speaks what we have seen and known as God’s goodness. Our words of testimony are offered freely, like seeds on the ground. It is God who gives the growth.

Like prayer, evangelism is fundamentally a spiritual practice. It does not simply arise out of nowhere. It rises primarily from your own loving, liberating, life-giving relationship with God. “True evangelism emerges only out of your own transformation,” David Gortner says in his book *Transforming Evangelism*. “Your message of hope, of abiding faith, of joy - your ‘song of love unknown’ - can only become natural, free, and open when you recall for yourself those moments of rescue, reorienting, awakening, and invigoration that are the result of God’s work within and around you.” (p. 2) In other words, evangelism is something that pours out of me because of God’s love.

Seek. As Episcopalians, we promise in our Baptismal Covenant “to seek and serve Christ in all persons.” This invites us to a great, unending adventure! What a gift -- to embark into the world around us listening and looking for Christ in every person. To listen for God present in others is a bold statement of faith, and fundamentally different from the posture of some Christians who go out assuming they are only meeting the absence of God. We dare to go out like sleuths, genuinely curious and assuming that we will find Christ, and that God has gone before us into all places and is at work in every life. Imagine saying to yourself in every encounter (face-to-face or in cyberspace!), “I am meeting Jesus the living Christ in this person”: how does this change how you listen, look, and invite more in your encounter?

Seeking is an active approach. It is not merely passive listening. It is a way of listening and looking that is activated by a yearning to find the presence of the Holy Spirit -- a “holy curiosity.” It is a habit of being attuned, tuning in to signs of God at work, wondering about others’ lives, passions, longings, blessings, joys, and sorrows. This means that seeking Christ in every person involves a constant choice: choosing to listen in a certain way. We meet others curious, even eager, to hear stories and expectant that God is moving in people’s lives and hearts and actions all around us. Such attentive interest and eagerness to hear the good in people’s lives is an act of evangelism even by itself -- think of what a gift it is to be so fully heard and seen.

Name. Nobody is a mind-reader. As many of us have said to our children as they learn how to communicate, we can now remind ourselves: “Use your words!” Evangelism is the telling of God’s good news. It involves our words and all of our expressive powers. It means speaking. We speak to name the Holy when we hear and see signs of the loving presence of Jesus.[1] We speak to point out to people where we see God at work in their lives. It can be so simple: “I hear

God working through you in your story of how you and your family handled that situation.” This is one of the great gifts of evangelism -- announcing God’s goodness and presence in people’s lives, and holding up a mirror to let them know. Imagine it: if we do not name God as the one we see, people around us may never know.

Celebrate. What’s not to celebrate when we see signs of God’s goodness in our lives and the lives of others? Jesus invites us into loving, liberating, life-giving relationship with God, each other, and the whole creation. When we seek and find Christ in others and in our own lives, we find ourselves encouraged, grateful, surprised and delighted, like the widow in Jesus’ parable who finds her lost coin and goes out saying “Rejoice with me!” (Luke 15:8-10). We celebrate good news, especially the good news of the presence of God in others.

It’s important to distinguish this celebration from a naïve view of the world. Ask communities that have struggled – ask anyone who comes to faith through a liberation lens – and they will tell you that the most powerful reason to celebrate is because you’ve overcome something by the grace, power and abiding love of God. African-American spirituals celebrate a God who makes a way out of no way. Latin American liberation theologians speak of Jesus as the one who enters solidarity with anyone who has ever suffered, the savior who defeats death. We’re celebrating the triumph of life, when the forces of this world made life seem impossible.

Jesus’ loving presence. We are Trinitarian Christians: the Father has created us in love, the Son has redeemed us in love, the Holy Spirit sustains us in love. Lots of us feel hesitant talking about Jesus, perhaps because we’re worried about stereotypes. We are *Christ*-ians, patterning our lives after the one who was and is God among us, revealing the truest and fullest incarnation of the Holy ever to grace the earth. In our evangelism, we invite people to discover more of life with him. Without Jesus, it’s not evangelism.

Seeking, naming, and celebrating Jesus’ loving presence is a spiritual practice of attentiveness and readiness to see and speak of the God who is love and who yearns to draw the whole world to Godself. That loving presence is found not only in the obvious joyful moments, but also in the difficult moments in people’s lives. We recognize it through signs like what St. Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit: joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. We recognize the Holy One at work in those classic “cardinal virtues” of wisdom, commitment to justice, moderation, and courage, and in resilience, determination, honesty, purpose, vigor, and warmth. So, we can take note in our interactions and in our sharing of our own stories: If it doesn’t feel like good news to you, and it doesn’t sound like good news to the other person, it’s not the “evangelion” - it’s not evangelism.

Jesus’ loving presence is something we acknowledge with our words. It also has to show up in us. We live as his body, his hands and feet in the world. Evangelist Carrie Boren Headington

talks about three central practices of evangelism, and one of them is social action and reconciliation. As she explains:

We are propelled by gratitude to share God's overflowing grace with the world around us, joining the way of Jesus in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, welcoming the stranger, and breaking systems of injustice and systemic poverty. Our message gains its power and authenticity when we live it out, caring, loving, and fighting for the least of these -- and then clearly stating why we do what we do.

Our acts of social care, justice, and reconciliation witness powerfully to God's vision and calling for all humanity. Those acts gain more powerful witness when accompanied by words. Our words, our good news, in these situations are public witness to God's truth as good news. ... Our public witness in these moments points to a higher vision that arises from our faith and from holy scripture.

Theologian Walter Brueggeman makes the connection, as well.

Evangelism is an invitation and summon to reinstate our talk and walk according to the reality of God, a reality not easily self-evident in our society. The call of the Gospel includes the negative assertion that the technological- therapeutic militaristic consumer world is false, not to be trusted or obeyed, and the positive claim that an alternative way in the world is legitimated by and appropriate to the new governance of God who is back in town.[2]

That's what the good news of Jesus' loving presence looks like. Episcopal evangelism welcomes people to be part of a Jesus Movement that's dedicated to partnering with God in the fulfillment of that loving, liberating and life-giving dream.

Stories. At the heart of our Christian faith is a story -- we might call it the Great Story, the collection of stories of God's creating, redeeming work found in scripture. The heart of the Great Story is in the stories of Jesus, but our lives and all lives become part of this Great Story. Every encounter with God yields a story. Every moment of gift and grace is a story of God's goodness.

What from the Bible and the Christian tradition do you treasure? Why? What do they reveal to you about God, and how do they speak to your own life? In our postmodern context, the church often shrinks away from proclamation and focuses more on social action. We all too easily give a drink of water without speaking of Jesus Christ, the Living Water. Without proclamation, the church becomes merely a social agency. As Headington reminds us, evangelism includes showing and telling about the Kingdom of God.

Know and embrace the Great Story. Also be eager to ask people for their stories. In people's stories, we hear God's movement. It is a gift to people to offer them an opportunity to tell their own stories, especially those stories of joy, gratitude, and wonder. And prepare to tell your story. Practice telling the stories of God's goodness in your own life -- tell them to yourself and to others. You could start one of those gratitude journals Oprah Winfrey promotes. Learn and know the stories in your own life that speak of God's goodness.

It is ultimately in the interplay of these three storylines -- God's story, your story, and my story -- that God's Word becomes clear, and so good news is fully heard. It is an amazing dance when we invite others' stories, share our own stories in response, and draw in portions of the Great Story that speak to the stories we have heard. Stories are at the heart of who we are. They are part of our identity. They define us, and they transform us.

Of all People. To grow evangelism as a spiritual practice, we need to begin as Episcopalians to grow our own capacity to seek, see, own, and name God at work in all people. Let's begin with you. YOU are made in God's image, and you are a bearer of Christ. That means that your own stories are already full of God's presence -- in day-to-day experiences of your life, in the choices you make and the ways you choose to live and serve, and in moments of important change. As we tell these stories from our own lives more, we will find that our gratitude grows.

This capacity to see God's movement in our lives and to talk about it is what Headington calls "proclamation," the first of the central evangelism practices.

Stories of gratitude, wonder, and delight are infectious -- but only if shared. As Paul emphasized, "How are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? Blessed are the feet of those who bring good news" (Romans 10:14-15). At the heart of proclamation is testimony, speaking of what we have known, experienced, and seen directly. What are the stories that are testimony to God's movement in your life?

We can also see God's movement and the loving presence of Jesus in others. This requires a readiness to see a world shot through with God and helping others get a glimpse of what you see of God in them. Our offering of our own stories can open up stories from others, and we can meet others' stories with our own. This swapping of stories helps us hear and name the Holy in each other, and invite people to recognize God's holy ground.

Invite everyone to MORE. Evangelism is more than conversing, being a friend, listening or even walking alongside someone in their spiritual journey. Evangelism doesn't end with naming and celebrating Christ present in the stories shared. Sharing good news moves us toward inviting others to something more -- to a deeper encounter with Jesus, to following Jesus into fuller life-

giving and liberating relationship with God, and to taking this journey with others who are part of the community of faith. Inviting is a joyous endeavor that arises naturally from the sharing of stories and the seeking and naming of Christ at work in another person's life -- to invite them to the great banquet of Jesus Christ and to the great adventure of following Jesus.

Lots of us would rather skip the invitation step. As Headington notes, invitation is one of the three central practices of evangelism. In scripture, Jesus organizes his ministry around invitation: "Come, follow me." "Go and do likewise." "Come to my house." "Go and sin no more." "Stay with us, break bread with us." Even the very practice of evangelism is rooted in our acceptance of God's invitation to us. "God is the great evangelist," Headington says, "and yet God graciously allow us, Christ's Body, to be His ambassadors making His appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:20)."

Our invitation cannot and must not treat people like projects or objects. In the moment, it may be natural to invite someone to more dialogue ("Could we meet again?"), more reflection (scripture, books, poems, videos or movies) or more Christian community (worship, outreach, study group, link to others with mutual interests). It could be the invitation to see more of God at work in themselves, in us, and in the world.

When we invite others to something more, our invitation has to be accompanied from beginning to beyond end with hospitable welcome and mutual interest. There's no mystery to the invitation. We invite people to things that we already know are loving, liberating and life-giving. We don't invite people to things that are dull, disinterested, or divisive. Sometimes the adventure may lead to an invitation to church, to baptism, or to affirmation and blessing of a faith community that is already forming. Sometimes it will not. Our work is not to press the question, but to listen with deep interest and to invite others to ponder with us the possibilities of a God who intends on gathering every human being into God's loving embrace. Like naming the Holy, inviting to further discovery requires gentleness and wisdom along with courage.

If we are practicing evangelism well -- by seeking and sharing good news of Jesus' life-giving, loving, liberating presence -- we may not need to be the ones inviting. We may find others inviting us into action. In the conversation between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts, Philip doesn't do the inviting. At each stage, the Ethiopian eunuch invites Philip to lead him on the next step -- he even invites his own baptism!

Evangelism isn't something to dread. Episcopal evangelists are not selling Jesus or the church, nor are we in charge of whether anyone follows Jesus. That movement belongs to the Holy Spirit. Still, the more we're in tune with the loving presence of Jesus, the more we're experiencing the fullness of a loving, liberating, and life-giving relationship with God, it wants to overflow. That overflow is evangelism.

The Gospel and Technology

Christian faith and technology have been synced up from the beginning. Some would argue that the Incarnation happened when it did in human history because the Roman Empire made it relatively safe to travel along roads and ride the seas in a thriving maritime industry. One could imagine the Incarnation happened at the earliest moment that it was possible for the Gospel to spread with the fewest physical obstacles.

A close reading of Acts shows how dependent the early Church and the apostles were on the technology of their day. St. Paul is constantly journeying at sea – he and his companions survived a shipwreck (Acts 27) and were easily able to book passage on another ship to continue their voyage to Rome. Look at how many stories in Acts occur along Roman-built roads, from Philip's encounter with the Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) to Paul's encounter with the risen Christ (Acts 9).

Technologies like roads and ships made it possible to form community, share news and notice others' lives in ways that weren't possible before. Written technologies did the same. The Church was an early adopter of the codex form of written communication, traditionally said to have been invented by Julius Caesar. The early Church readers preferred the codex to the scroll because it made it easier to look at the parallels between the Gospels or to see the connections between the Christian and Hebrew scriptures.

Likewise, it is hard to imagine the incendiary teachings of Martin Luther and other Reformers traveling very far without the nearly concurrent invention of the printing press. That technology allowed not only the dissemination of revolutionary writings, but put copies of the Bible, often in vernacular language, into the hands of laity. One of the most important reforms during the reign of King Henry VIII was the printing of the "Great Bible" and its distribution around England to parishes where it was authorized to be read during public worship. The Church found a technology that allowed it to share the Good News more effectively than it had previously, and it enthusiastically embraced it, despite the unintended consequences and subsequent controversies that the technology empowered.

In the 19th century, churches used new technologies for long ocean-going expeditions to bring the Gospel to far off continents – albeit with mixed consequences (especially from the view of the original inhabitants of the "discovered" lands). By the 20th century, we come to the modern era and a breathtaking series of advances in communications technology. Telegraphs and telephones were quickly adopted by church congregations and state and national structures as a tool to coordinate missionary work around the world. Movies were used to share the Gospel in ways intended to move the hearts and minds of audiences – for instance, consider the impact of (Episcopalian!) Cecile B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*.

The Church made use not just the movies themselves, but of the places where they were shown. The Crystal Cathedral in California had its origins in a drive-in theater that Robert Schuller and his wife Arvella used as they were planting a new church. The mega-church movement is dependent on and emerged in response to the shift in culture resulting from increasing use of cars. Television and radio were quickly used by preachers and congregations in many ways, supporting local congregations, reaching national audiences for particularly compelling preachers, or sharing major worship events with people who would have no other way of participating.

And then there is the computer. I can't remember the last time I bought a printed edition of a biblical reference work or commentary set rather than purchasing an electronic version to add to my computer's library. The very nature of preaching has changed, from a direct preacher-to-parishioner auditory experience to a podcasted, time-shifted, multimedia presentation. Some congregations form online – like the Slate Project in Baltimore – and other virtual congregations never meet person to person, but have vibrant prayer and worship in online locations – whether in virtual reality, or simply by using a common web resource.

It's not all surprising then that the Church is thinking carefully about social media and the network effects that undergird it. The rise of Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest and whatever is coming next is all built on the recognition that information in a highly interconnected environment that is published by many to many. This is a far cry from the days when information was primarily published one to many or one to one. We're still at the beginnings of this particular communications revolution, but it should be clear that the Church is no stranger to learning to use and adapt technology for God's purposes.

Evangelism and Social Media

We are still learning about how to leverage social media for evangelism. But one thing we know: if we limit ourselves to one-directional communication – view static website here, send email there – we're missing the best part of social media *and* the heart of evangelism. As we noted in the section on Episcopal evangelism, this practice never succeeds merely by posting signs, painting front doors red, or creating destinations. The good news of God's abundant love spreads through the words of day-to-day conversation and through the actions tied to words of testimony and love by Christians in public life. Christians become more fully spiritually alive when they go public and find the living Christ who goes before us, ready to listen for and speak about and act in harmony with God's goodness in the warp and woof of their relationships and public life.

As you go forth to practice Episcopal evangelism, allow these three biblically-informed principles to ground you. Think of them almost as postures, a way of positioning yourself, especially in relation to social media.

Be prepared to be converted

*I think ... the missionary's job is to preach, not the church but Christ. If he preaches Christ and the message of Christianity, the church may well result, may well appear, but it might not be the church he had in mind. (Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 1978, Fides: Indiana, 810)*

While this insight is nearly forty years old, it seems especially true in the new context of social media and the world wide web. The world wide web is a new missionary context, a real place, and a world of relationships. The kind of Gospel sharing that takes place there is very real and the people to whom we are sent are very real. In fact, God is already at work using the forms of social media, search engines, and the like to link people to the Gospel. In order for us to leave our church homes and be missionaries in this context, we must first be converted from old ways of thinking and doing.

In Acts 10, we are told that a centurion by the name of Cornelius is already searching for God, seeking with the people of his household, to know God. He is a good man who gives generously to others and does good works. He isn't part of the church, but he prays to God. In the context of that prayer, God tells him to send for a man called Peter. Peter is utterly confused: Why would God send him to a Roman centurion? Does this man fear God? Why is he eating those unclean foods and welcoming people who have no part of Christian community? While Cornelius' faithfulness doesn't fit the mold of a good upstanding religious person in Peter's experience – God has made Cornelius and God is inviting Cornelius into community.

God works on Peter's heart. He eventually spends time with Cornelius, enters his home, eats his food, and his eyes open wide. "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him," Peter declares. He then bears witness to the Gospel, telling the Great Story of Jesus who preached peace, brought God's power of healing and release, was killed and yet rose again. While Peter is still speaking, the Holy Spirit comes down with power and might and blesses all who are there, Cornelius' household and Peter's cohort. Everyone is converted.

The work of evangelization and sharing the Good News of God's reconciling love in the context of the world Wide Web is going to look different than the church many of us grew up with—in our verbal, face-to-face, and virtual relationships, and in our action and testimony in the physical and virtual public square. If we do it well, the Gospel will be proclaimed to many people of every tribe and nation most of whom are different than ourselves. Many may be considered unclean or even unprepared for the Gospel. Many will more than likely ask questions that will make us uncomfortable and challenge our notions about what's good or holy or Christian. In the

end practicing the work of evangelism in the context of the internet and social media breaks down stumbling blocks in our own experience of church. Not unlike Peter, it will break us down, change our hearts, go against our best manners and assumptions, and in the end, will convert us.

As missionaries have rediscovered in every age, there is no fixed predetermined outcome in the work of evangelism. Just as has happened to faithful Christians who have crossed into unfamiliar cultures, through social media and the world-wide web there is mutual transformation—of those seeking God, and those seeking to share God with others.

Be curious and open to follow

In Acts 8 we encounter the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip, one of the disciples. Philip is sent by God to go to a wilderness road, not so different from any of us apostles (the meaning of the word is “one who is sent”) who have to set out to unfamiliar places and people. Philip goes and finds a eunuch we are told, who is a God-fearer and who is on his way home the Jerusalem temple. God tells Philip to go to him, and so he runs to catch up with the eunuch’s chariot. Drawn by holy curiosity, he comes alongside this other person to discover what he is reading and studying.

It turns out the eunuch is reading Isaiah. Philip takes the opening: “Do you understand what you are reading?” From this point on, the Ethiopian eunuch is the one leading the conversation, opening each new doorway. “How can I understand, without someone to help me?” he says. Later, after Philip opens the scriptures with him, the eunuch asks, “Are these words of the prophet about himself or someone else?” And as they ride along, and the eunuch discovers his own desire for relationship with Jesus, he asks: “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized, right here and now?”

At each point, Philip responds faithfully and fully, finding ways to say yes and keep going deeper on the journey as a companion. Philip is not leading, but he is consistently opening space—by being present, by being caring and curious, by keeping a non-defensive or aggressive posture, and by offering interpretation that is simple and straightforward. Philip opens doors by approaching, asking the inquisitive first question, and moving unafraid with the flow of the conversation.

Consider this story from Acts as a mirror and example for what we do in our face-to-face and social media encounters. The eunuch represents for us this group of people who are searching and asking questions about the God they believe in. There are people all around us searching for God, for meaning, for communities of purpose, for ways to offer themselves to others. Many of them are searching the web and using social media to find out more about God, faith, or a community. We are invited to enter the work of social media and the web in the same way that we are invited to enter physical spaces around us more fully – to listen, to share the story, to welcome others’ stories, to participate in what God is already doing in our midst.

Certainly, we can set up our own attractational websites, and this is good, but without entering wider conversations, it can also become another version of “red door evangelism” (as in, “Paint the door red, and the people will come.”) Just as in our verbal and face-to-face interactions in daily life, the work of evangelism in social media is more diverse than posting an internet “sign” (website) or inviting people to visit a site. The deeper, richer, more complete evangelism involves our participating in conversations, discussions, and communities that are already present online and on the web—being who we are in Christ, immersing ourselves in the conversation, listening for and naming God at work, and inviting further and deeper connection.

Some of our family members, for example, are part of neighborhood groups online. Whenever anyone asks where to go to church, it launches a discussion about what they are looking for. Why not share stories from Episcopal communities? As other issues emerge online, why not show up and explore with people, noticing the parallels with scripture and the Christian tradition (important work in a culture of diminishing religious literacy)? From movies to news, we can speak a good word and a gospel word into these situations. Anyone can shout or paste angry hateful memes on Facebook. Share stories or invite people to consider how a TED talk impacts their spiritual life.

There are many other possibilities. But first, like Philip, it is most important to listen for the Spirit’s bidding, then to approach, listen, and walk alongside people in context. Then, like Philip, we can enter conversation with curiosity and wait for others’ responses to help guide us and to open doors.

Be expectant to see the Holy anew

What we are arguing for here is full dissolution of the false modern idea of a division between secular and profane space—whether between inside and outside the church building, or between physical face-to-face presence and the web. We claim as Episcopalians that God is at work in the world and that all things are created by God. In fact, our creed says all things reflect the image of the divine Trinity – most especially the mysterious second person – God in Christ Jesus. If this is true, then everything can be a vessel for the Gospel and a bearer of Christ’s presence.

One of the greatest hindrances to doing the work of evangelism through social media is that we very often believe and say that it is of no value—just as has been said over the ages about foreigners outside the culture, or eunuchs, or uncircumcised, or those who eat different foods or gather in different ways. Saints Cyril and Methodius crossed a division imposed by the Church of their age, daring to lead worship and write the words of scripture in Slavonic languages rather than expecting Slavs to learn Latin in order to hear the Gospel and to gather in faith. To say that anything in all of creation is of no value is to deny its connection to the God that created it. Instead of denying social media, embrace it and see how it could relate to the Gospel.

Paul teaches the master course in this practice. In Acts 17, we find him in Athens. He is walking through the town of Athens, and he sees it is filled with idols and false Gods. (Certainly this might be an apt description of the internet). Now consider this: a false god mimics God and may even have some of the attributes of God though is clearly not God. So Paul invites conversation with everyone who represents the many and various deities of that city, including the authorities of the city. And then he speaks ...

Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. (Acts 17:22-25).

Paul bears witness and uses the local idols and the statue and temple to the unnamed God to proclaim the message of the Gospel. Not everyone is convinced. Not everyone will be convinced by our efforts either. However, he uses the symbols and cultural context to talk about God. What seems profane and unholy becomes a tool for opening up a vision of God.

Everything and everyone reflects the divine image, in big and small ways. The apostles' challenge is to seek a clear vision of how this reflects the nature and mission of God in Christ Jesus. In surprising ways, the Jesus Movement is already at work in the world around us. The question is, are we willing to go out and to see this even in the supposedly profane and unclean? The internet is a street filled with temples and idols and, like Athens, offers an opportunity for us to enter its confines and city walls, walk and discover, and then proclaim God's saving grace.

Just as our forebears shared and celebrated the good news on the physical mission frontiers, so today the frontiers of web and media are contexts where light and life and hope are already available to move the whole world toward God.

Our hope is that you will discover this new place more fully. Enter and be yourself as you are in Christ. Treat each person as holy ground. Let yourself be open to speak from your faith. Invite continuing relationship. These hold true in our verbal conversations and face-to-face encounters. They are also true for our relationships through social media. Indeed, it may be that our practice of evangelistic presence, listening, and speaking through social media can carry us more deeply into loving relationship with Jesus. Welcome to the adventure.

[1] For more on "naming the Holy," see Gortner, David *Transforming Evangelism* (New York: Church Publishing), 2008. P. 32, 44, 137-145.

[2] Quoted in *The Study of Evangelism: exploring a missional practice of the church* ed. Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner (Eerdmans, 2008) p. 233.