



*Web-based communities can promote a deeper knowledge of Christ and His plan for community. The article below discusses how a web-empowered outreach program can attract people into a virtual community that promotes a deeper knowledge of Christ through worship and fellowship in real communities. A proven process follows the following five steps:*

- 1. Web-based communities can respond to a wide array of felt needs.*
- 2. Felt needs are addressed at a deeper level in real communities.*
- 3. Real communities emphasize Biblical education.*
- 4. Biblical education leads to personalized guidance in prayer groups.*
- 5. Prayer group involvement stimulates interest in developing a deeper knowledge of Christ through worship in real communities.*

## **The Web-Empowered Outreach Process.**

By Tim Voorhees

### ***Introduction***

Huge and growing numbers of internet users spend long hours restlessly clicking from web page to web page. They find myriad enticing web sites that appeal to lust, loneliness, greed, and other basic desires. Inevitably, however, internet users encounter much disappointment when seeking fulfillment of their desires by trusting in the tantalizing rhetoric found on the world wide web. No amount of restless clicking on hyperlinks will provide the fulfillment that humans can find only in a relationship with Christ.

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Fortunately, despite the many serious limitations of the web, we can exploit internet technology to develop exciting graphical images that define a deep vision for community based on Christ's love. Moreover, we can actively communicate these visions using widely-disseminated email messages. In this way, web users can appreciate more fully the depth and width of Christ's love.

The church has an opportunity to capture the attention of restless web users and lead them to appreciate Christ's love more fully. Church members can follow the five-step process summarized above and explained below to lead net users into a more fulfilling personal relationship with Christ.

### *1. Web-based communities can respond to a wide array of felt needs*

Evangelism begins with addressing heartfelt needs and desires. The web gives us incredible power to respond to real and perceived needs in myriad personalized ways. An engaging web site can capture the attention of any believer or non-believer with images, sounds, and headlines that entice the web user to click on hyperlinks to other web pages. Web users click on links knowing that behind any link may be a new web page with solutions to financial, emotional, relational, spiritual, or other needs. (For examples of church-affiliated web sites with compelling "eye candy," see [www.theocentric.com](http://www.theocentric.com), [www.indychristian.com](http://www.indychristian.com), [www.kcchristian.com](http://www.kcchristian.com), or [www.yourchurch.com](http://www.yourchurch.com).)

The web becomes a Mars Hill where the evangelist speaks to all types of people using the language of the culture. Through web evangelism, faceless clickers are drawn into virtual communities of Christians. In the virtual communities, email and listserv relationships form. Through these virtual connections, church members can promote dialog and invite web users to visit real communities.

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## *2. Felt needs are addressed at a deeper level in real communities*

During this second step, web clickers learn about how they can visit real communities of Christians and experience the blessings of rich fellowship. Churches committed to Christ share Christ's love by developing church activities that meet needs of present and prospective members. Members reach out to newcomers through culture events, pitch-in dinners, book clubs, and other types of warm fellowship. (For examples of how this outreach takes place, see [www.covenant.net/singles.htm](http://www.covenant.net/singles.htm).)

As unchurched people enter real church communities, church members can suggest ways that newcomers can meet kindred spirits and address personal issues in various affinity groups. These affinity groups will typically emphasize Biblical education. In this way, the unchurched are led to the third stage in the evangelism process.

## *3. Real communities emphasize Biblical education*

Successful churches will typically meet needs by providing a broad menu of Bible-based educational programs with instruction on finances, dating, peacemaking, life planning, and other topics that touch the hearts of unchurched people. The unchurched will often attend these educational programs because the classes seem safe and relatively free from staid, irrelevant, or overly abstract religious rhetoric. To minimize the appearance of dull religion, classes will often be held away from the church premises or on days other than Sunday. (For an example of a church that provides a broad array of enticing programs, see <http://www.willowcreek.org/wccc/Connect.htm>.)

During the educational phase, skilled teachers explain that instruction is best personalized in small groups. The unchurched person is encouraged to join an affinity group led by a mature believer who can understand the needs of attendees.

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In this way, instructors encourage transition to prayer groups. The prayer group involvement is the fourth stage of involvement.

#### *4. Biblical education leads to personalized guidance in prayer groups.*

As a leader provides instruction about issues of concern to attendees, opportunities arise for discussing prayer concerns and encouraging Biblical prayer. For example, during a class on issues of interest to unmarried adults, the leader may recommend that people stay after the class ends to meet other singles in male or female prayer groups. This format works well at Bible Study Fellowship and in various singles programs.

A good prayer meeting leader will apply Scripture to prayer concerns in a way that teaches the relevancy of the Bible to personal concerns. The leader will talk about Christ as the author of the knowledge. The leader can also offer testimony about the benefits of personal relationship with Christ.

During a prayer meeting, attendees learn how Biblical principles can be applied to personal concerns. This application of Biblical truth stimulates deep interest in knowing the author of Scripture and also in knowing prayerful believers who relate Scripture to personal concerns.

As circumstances permit, a prayer meeting leader can discuss how we can often develop the closest relationship with our Creator while worshipping with other committed believers. In this way, prayer group attendees see the benefits of attending worship services regularly.

#### *5. Prayer group involvement stimulates interest in developing a deeper knowledge of Christ through worship in real communities.*

At a good church, the worship service provides the best opportunity to meet prayerful believers who gather to exalt the author of Scripture. The worship service

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leader can communicate the character of the Biblical Christ in a way that leads people to seek Him and know Him at a deeper level. This deep understanding of our Creator leads to greater interest in knowing Christ through sermons, prayer, music, and other spiritual disciplines.

The Lord works through worship services to strengthen the church with growing numbers of people who enjoy worshipful experiences throughout the week. Individuals who once clicked restlessly among web pages for elusive answers to felt needs instead rest peacefully in their knowledge about Christ. They see how Christ responds lovingly to real needs. Restless web users find rest in Christ alone.

### *Conclusion*

As people develop a deeper knowledge of Christ, they want to share His love through evangelism. They can do so by harnessing information technology to reach the unchurched. As we follow the five-step process explained above, outreach efforts grow exponentially.

Local churches can be filled with believers who develop virtual relationships through church web sites. The church-sponsored web sites can encourage development of fulfilling real relationships through education, prayer groups, worship services, and other activities at the local church. Ultimately, through the use of both virtual relationships and real relationships, huge numbers of believers can more fully “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:18-19)