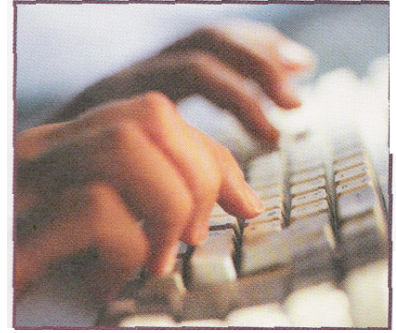


TO BLOG OR NOT TO BLOG

by Bryan McAnally

Editor, Men@Work



Online journals, or weblogs ("blogs"), are an exploding phenomenon on the Internet. Every day more and more individuals, businesses and even churches start blogs to communicate with family, friends, co-workers or a targeted audience. Pew Research Center estimates the number of bloggers to be between 2 million and 9 million.

Innovative pastors recognize that a blog is not just a digital journal but a useful tool for ministry and leading the local church. Many of you may be wondering, *Should I start a blog? Would it be a valuable addition to my ministry?* Here are reasons you might consider starting your own weblog.

- **TO COMMUNICATE SERMONS** A few days after preaching your sermon, you can post the text on your blog for traveling church members or others who weren't able to attend worship. This also provides a text archive for messages that later can be useful resources for you, your staff and your congregation.
- **TO SHARE VISION** As the Lord reveals His plan for your church, you can communicate that vision through a blog. You can explain in detail-and most important-convey excitement for growth plans, new classes or other opportunities available to members and visitors.
- **TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY** Many blogging formats allow for comments where readers can type in their feedback to the content posted. This feature provides discussion for building relationships and a forum for conversations about scripture and other topics of interest. It may even be an evangelistic outreach by providing a spot for Q & A among people who visit your blog with spiritual questions.
- **TO TEACH DOCTRINE OR THEOLOGY** A good way to communicate Baptist and biblical distinctives is to post a series on doctrines. Some blogging software offer free "plug-ins" (additions to automate otherwise-difficult Internet code) for inserting links to scriptures that support doctrinal positions. This makes your Bible study interactive and engaging.
- **TO OFFER SOCIAL COMMENTARY** Current events allow unlimited opportunities to provide commentary that promote a biblical worldview. A basic understanding of how to link up with online news sources can allow you to connect your congregation with the world's events and

God's timeless truth. This helps people understand that God's Word is relevant for every life circumstance.

- **TO INFORM YOUR CONGREGATION ABOUT EVENTS** Using a blog to comment about upcoming scheduled events, including information about what's needed for the event, will help increase the awareness of opportunities and activities on your church's calendar. As the pastor, it will communicate your personal interest in the activity.
- **TO BREAK DOWN "THE FOURTH WALL"** Many people view their pastor like they do a television character "larger-than-life" personality with whom they only interact by a handshake on the way out of church. A pastor who blogs about his family or about the real challenges and humor of every day life demonstrates himself to be approachable, pleasant -even likable (gasp!).

GETTING STARTED

1. Survey other pastors' blogs. The search engine blogs4God.com has more than 1,200 bloggers. Crosswalk.com also has blogs you can read.
2. Talk with your family and ministry team. Deciding to blog should be treated like any other ministry decision.
3. Choose your target audience and voice. Are you going to blog primarily for church members, the unchurched or both? A clear sense of the audience you want to reach and what you want to communicate is key to the effectiveness of your blog. You'll also want to think about the voice-some blogs are humorous, others are preachy, others conversational.
4. Choose a computer program or blog service. If you're really into web design, learn how to use programs like Dreamweaver or Front Page. Or use an automated blogging service to develop and maintain your site. Many free or inexpensive blogging software services exist, including a free online resource at www.crosswalk.com called "Blog Town" where you can create your own weblog.

Explore the options for weblogs and discover how you can increase your ministry's effectiveness and provide a high-quality online presence for your church. You'll be amazed at the community you'll discover!