

Lutheran Life[®]

ISSUE 122

Inside this issue:

Find a balance
between faith, family,
and technology.

THE INTERSECTION

OF FAITH AND TECHNOLOGY

BY AMY BIRD

Technology is part of almost every aspect of life—just like faith! It seeps into our classrooms, workplaces, and homes. It influences how we use devotions, how we tithe, and how we teach our kids.

Just as the writers of the New Testament used Greek because it was the universally understood language of the Roman Empire, just as the apostle Paul used Roman roads to swiftly and safely pass from town to town on his missionary journeys, and just as Martin Luther harnessed Johannes Gutenberg's printing press to make faith resources accessible in the common language of the people, so we continue today to use the available technology to spur on the faith through the means and in the language familiar to our neighbors.

It's not a matter of *if* we use technology but *how*. How are we being intentional about our time and connections with the people God places around us—physically and digitally? How are we seeking opportunities to share matters of the faith to all people through the common language of our digital land?

Let's begin by exploring the crossroads of faith and technology through this excerpt from *Faithfully Connected: Integrating Biblical Principles in a Digital World* by Ben Boche and Jake Hollatz (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018, 9–10):

Life in the twenty-first century has become integrated in fundamental ways. Home heating and air conditioning can be controlled remotely. Our vehicles can be started via a key fob for early heating or cooling. We can

Speak with our friends and family over the phone, with text messages, and with video chats. Questions can be answered by Google, Siri, Alexa, or Cortana. The primary strand that integrates all of these everyday conveniences is technology. Advances in technology have enabled our lives to be integrated or connected with others around us, from shopping experiences to learning.

It is a rare experience to walk into a school classroom in any type of community and not find technology that enables learning to reach out further than it ever has. Gone are the days of the Encyclopedia Britannica volumes sitting on a classroom or library shelf. They have been replaced by the current realities of Discovery Education streaming, Wikipedia, and About.com integrated into common internet searches. To make information searching even easier, students are using smartphones and other mobile technology to integrate instant information gathering into everyday learning experiences.¹

Even though our lives have been completely permeated by technology, the vast majority of the population interacting with the new technological realities are still digital immigrants.² As we grapple with moving from traditional twentieth-century roles for learning, communicating, and shopping (to name but a few of a growing list), we simultaneously are embracing the conveniences of twenty-first-century technology. Smartphones with a multitude of apps seem to be replacing common tasks like shopping, navigation, and talking to our neighbors or friends. The complete impact of a world with technology that integrates into our everyday experience is somewhat unclear. However, we must recognize that it is changing the way we think, act, learn, and believe.

Rather than simply letting technology change and sometimes control the way we think, act, learn, and believe, we must be proactive not only in how we use technology, but also in how we view its role in our lives. What kind of environment—both offline and online—do we want to be a part of and even create? Where do our Christian beliefs and practices fit in and affect what we do with technology? Citizenship can define our identity—whether it's national, digital, or faith-related. For us as Christians, our identity and most important citizenship is in Christ.

At the core of a Christian's life is the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world [Luke 2:11; John 20:31; Acts 5:31; 1 Timothy 4:10]. While some may not immediately agree that technology has changed this core belief, technology has certainly provided a platform to ask more questions and challenge more common assumptions than has been done in the past. Technology often claims to be a panacea for problems rather than a partner in finding solutions. Our hope is that, through a careful and critical integration of faith and technology, we can be confident that technology becomes a help rather than a hindrance for Christians in all aspects of life.

As we dive into the topic of faith and technology, consider the following reflection questions:

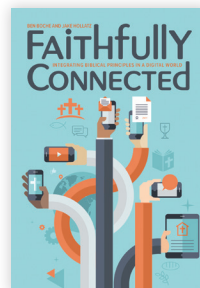
1. Stop and think for a moment about all of your social media profiles, your posts, your email signature, and your basic online presence. What do they say about you?
2. If someone from the outside looked at your search habits, what could they deduce about who you are? Would you be happy with the answer?
3. Is there something about you that does not show up online? Why or why not? Are you okay with that?³ ✝

¹ See Brad Maguth, "The Educative Potential of Cell Phones in the Social Studies Classroom," *The Social Studies*, 104:2 (2013), 87–91.

² See Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants: Part I," *On the Horizon* 9:5 (September–October 2001), 1–6.

³ Reflection questions from *Faithfully Connected: Integrating Biblical Principles in a Digital World*, 53.

FAITHFULLY CONNECTED



You know how to be a good citizen of society. But what about a good citizen of the digital society? Learn how to teach young Christians how to handle technology from a Christian perspective with this guidebook. Find this title and others listed in *Lutheran Life* at cph.org/llresources.

Technology at Home

BY AMY BIRD

Devices are not inherently evil (nor inherently good), but it's worth noting that what we give our time and attention to reveals our true priorities.

And for families, it's worth considering how our individual and collective actions impact our households.

¹Starter questions modified from *Faithfully Connected: Integrating Biblical Principles in a Digital World*, 10-1.

National surveys have reported that parents feel they have a harder time raising their children in this generation than their parents had raising them. I'm sure you've heard these statements, or felt this yourself, regardless of the statistics. I'd also imagine that feeling has increased over the last two years as parents have depended on technology to help guide their children through a global pandemic with school closures, remote learning, and increased time away from friends and social activities. In fact, the most cited reason for why parenting feels more difficult is technology.

Yet technology has been vital to the wellness of society. Livestreaming, video calls, and remote delivery services have created incredible opportunities for connection, learning, productivity, and safety. Grandchildren can FaceTime grandparents who live in another state, students can learn from peers at sister schools in another country, employees can increase their productivity and work-life satisfaction, and employers can save on overhead costs.

With all of these benefits, why would the majority of parents say that technology is making parenting harder?

Children model the actions and behaviors of their parents. This is true in all areas of life as kids grow up and learn what it means to live life in this world. That includes how to live digitally. Parents who are on their phones at the dinner table, for example, communicate to kids that it's okay to have devices at the table and that this can even take precedence over interacting with people who are physically in the same space. The same kind of unspoken approval is made when kids watch their parents text and drive, scroll during church, or check their phones in the checkout line.

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus taught, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In his Small Catechism explanation of the First Commandment, Martin Luther taught us how easy it is to make something a god. In the same way, what we give our time and attention to reveals our true priorities—things that easily become gods. And these actions shape the rhythms of our lives.

So what priorities and actions shape the lives of followers of Jesus? Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

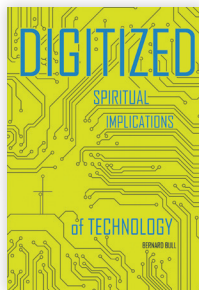
with all your mind. . . . And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37, 39).

As Christians, our lives are marked by humble love for God and joyful service to others. So how can we steward technology in ways that encourage our families to love God and others well? While the answer will vary based on your family's context, it should always include stewarding technology in ways that lead to meaningful conversations, deeper relationships, and increased care for your neighbor—including those living under the same roof.

One way to get started is by taking advantage of family moments during family prayers, devotions, mealtimes, or bedtime. Engage your children about their interactions online—and be willing to share about your own. Here are some starter questions:

- When I look at your phone, I see a lot of pictures you have taken. What kinds of things have you been doing?
- What kinds of things did you see online today? Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable? excited? curious? encouraged?
- What are your friends posting about? Are they displaying that they are a Christian by their words? Are you?
- How would you talk to your classmate about what you saw him or her post online?
- Can we pray for your friends who are having troubles?⁴

DIGITIZED: SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY



Technology impacts every portion of your life. See how you can balance the intersection of faith and technology from a biblical perspective with Bernard Bull. Find this title and others listed in *Lutheran Life* at cph.org/llresources.

Building Healthy Tech Habits

IN TEN SIMPLE STEPS

BY BRIAN SMITH, MD

Before COVID-19, digital tech was already a big part of our world. The pandemic has accelerated this process, wreaking digital havoc on both physical and mental well-being. Digital tech is not inherently good or bad, but as a tool created by man, it can be perverted by our sinful nature and used for the wrong reasons. It's not too late to build healthy tech habits so that we use these tools and they do not use us.



1

Take stock. Perform an inventory of the digital tech in your life. Write this stuff down. What do you use? How much time do you spend on each activity (social media, texting, etc.)?

2

Do a deeper dive. *Why do I use digital technology?* In other words, what am I seeking? Does tech satisfy this need in a healthy way? Often, we make the mistake of turning to tech to cope with stress or fill the God-shaped vacuums in our hearts.

3

Check yourself. *Do I have a problem with tech?* (Hint: Yes, we all do to one degree or another.) How can you tell if you have a problem? Ask yourself how hard it would be to disconnect. If you think you can't live without it, not even for a moment, that's concerning. *Do I worship tech and its content?* Also, monitor how tech makes you feel before, during, and after use. Tech can stir up emotions—anger, fear, and desire.



4

Do not beat yourself up about it. Digital tech is addictive; it's baked into its design. Every time you go online, dopamine is released from the pleasure center of your brain, causing repetitive use of tech. Then when you try to pull away, it pulls you back in with notifications and fear of missing out.

5

Do not panic. You can do this. Tech has never caused anybody to spontaneously combust. If the dangers were immediate, we would know by now. However, the physical and mental effects of long-term exposure to tech are insidious. We must not allow unhealthy tech habits to erode our lives from their purposes as intended by the Creator.

6

Purpose-driven tech use. Thoughtfully use technology, asking, to quote Socrates, “Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?” If there is not a healthy reason to use tech, you’re better off without it. Tech, as with all things, originated from God’s creation. As a child psychiatrist, I would not have been able to reach my patients without tech in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Telemedicine has been a blessing. I am not suggesting that you abandon all tech. But use it in a manner that glorifies God and is aligned with His purposes.

7

Do not multi-task. Do one thing at a time and do it well. Even for younger generations, multi-tasking does not work. It wastes time and causes errors. With distracted lives, we often focus on the wrong things.

8

Schedule. In the short term, fasting from tech may be necessary to break the cycle of overuse and overdependence. Then, in the long term, maximize the purposeful use of tech, overall using tech in moderation. Schedule activities such as exercise, cooking, face-to-face relationships, prayer, and time in nature. These activities are often neglected.

9

Seek help. Strong forces are at work in tech. They prey upon our sinful human nature. If you feel greatly distressed by the impact of tech in your life or it is causing impairment, you deserve help. This can start with self-help, such as reading this article and following these steps. But you do not have to go it alone. Turn to your church family for support. Seek Christian counseling. There is also a form of psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, that can benefit you.

10

Enjoy! Like all parts of our life, our use of tech is redeemed by Jesus Christ. With God at the rightful center of your life—and using healthy tech habits and receiving any help necessary to overcome challenges—you can now receive the blessings of tech without the harmful side effects. ✝



REDEEMING TECHNOLOGY



Rethink your technology habits and how they’re impacting all portions of your life, including your faith life, in *Redeeming Technology*. Discover helpful tips from both a pastor and board-certified psychiatrist. Find this title and others listed in *Lutheran Life* at cph.org/lresources.

A full-page photograph of two women walking and talking in a modern office. The woman on the left is Black, wearing a tan blazer, white top, black pants, and black boots, holding a red notebook and a pencil. The woman on the right is Asian, wearing a tan blazer, teal top, white skirt, and tan heels, holding a silver tablet. They are in front of a white brick wall. To the right, there is a window and a desk with a black chair and a small potted plant.

Technology

at Work

BY AMY BIRD

“The one constant in life is change.”

This old adage still rings true. And one of the biggest sources for that constant change? Technology. Moore’s Law is a helpful rule of thumb when considering the acceleration of technology. In 1965, Gordon Moore, a tech researcher, observed that we can expect the power of computers to roughly double every two years. Plotted on a graph, this rate of change eventually goes parabolic, meaning changes in technology are happening so quickly now that it’s nearly unrecognizable.

Remember the first cell phone? It was a brick. Then cell phones got smaller. We then tried out flip phones. Smartphones happened. And now we’re moving back to flip phones—did you notice?

In the last five years alone, I’ve seen my own workplace (a nonprofit creative agency) move from printed paper reviews that were manually passed around the office in plastic folders to emails with PDF attachments and now to a cloud-based review system. Looking further back over changes in the industry, we can trace the progression from mailed documents to fax machines to emails to DocuSign.

The point? The one constant at work (and in life) is change—and often, change is sparked by emerging technology.

Changing technology can streamline processes and reduce company spending. It can cut excess and increase productivity. Thinking again of my workplace over the last five years, we’ve doubled the number of jobs that cross our desks each year while maintaining (and even trimming) our headcount. How? Technological efficiencies.

While we can guarantee that technological changes will continue to evolve in the workplace, the idea of ongoing change doesn’t energize every employee. A staff-wide email announcing a software update can be enough to make some stomachs queasy. And especially after the last two-plus years of pressurized and politicized dynamics seeping into the office, the seemingly nonstop technological pivots to accommodate remote work can contribute to feelings of fatigue and burnout.

There’s a high chance you or someone you know has been dealing with burnout at work. And while a technology change isn’t necessarily the source for that burnout, the amount of change that’s happened at an accelerated rate in the last two-plus years can play into work-related stress.

Technological changes have shown our resilience and resourcefulness in the face of a global pandemic. It’s united and equipped people like never before. Some co-workers might seem more stubborn or withdrawn than usual, but their resistance to learning another new program may be a sign of a deeper sense of exhaustion and fatigue.

I celebrate the early adapters and visionaries among us who blaze the technological trail and see glimmers of what our future world of work could look like. We need you and are grateful for your gifts.

But for employees (and employers) who are feeling discouraged and tired of trying to keep up with the latest technological advances, hear the good news: There is something—rather, someone—who is even more dependable than change. Hebrews 13:8 tells us, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” His love for you requires no ongoing system updates. Receiving the grace and mercy offered to you in Jesus doesn’t necessitate the need for new equipment. Rather, the Spirit who claimed you as His own in your Baptism is the same Counselor who brings you peace and the same Guide who lights your path forward when everything else seems chaotic and confusing. Thanks be to God!

In a workplace where processes and procedures can seem ever-changing, we can cling to the reality that Jesus remains the same. When learning the newest technology seems too overwhelming for the day, Jesus is ready to provide His easy yoke for your rest in His care (Matthew 11:29–30). And when you’re ready to give it a go once again, Christ’s patience and perseverance will sustain you as you do the good work He’s prepared for you to do through your vocation. †

Teaching Kids Discernment in Using Technology

BY CHRISTA PETZOLD

I got my first cell phone about six months after I got my driver's license. It had no internet, and basic texting included unlimited "in network" and 500 messages "out of network." When my husband and I started dating, he was "out of network," so I owed my dad \$16 because we went over our limit. We learned to limit ourselves to 16 texts of 160 characters each per day, combined between the two of us. This is markedly different than the way teenagers use their phones today, but it was also completely different from how my parents communicated when they were in high school.

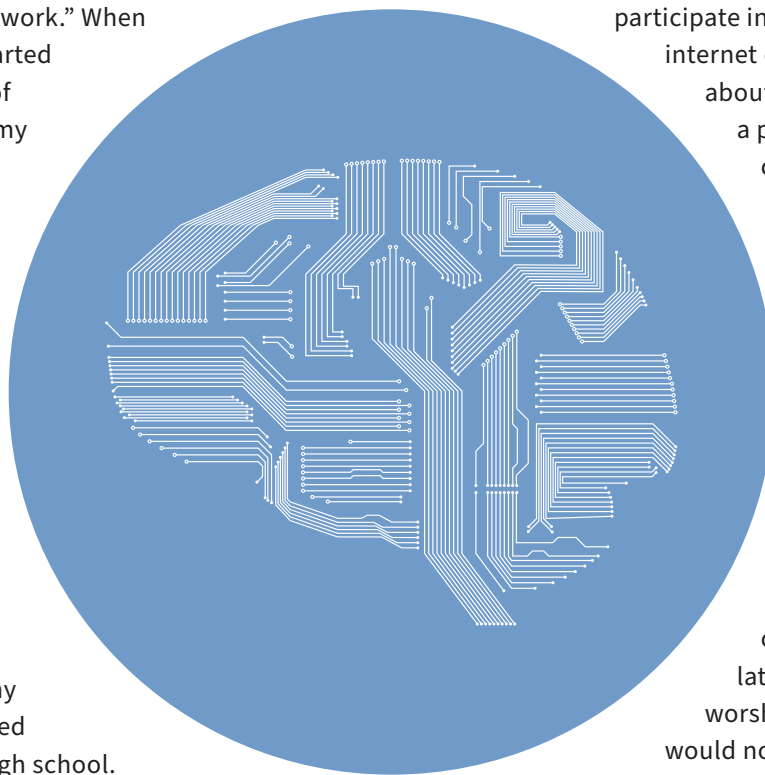
Technology has changed fast, and it hasn't just changed how we complete tasks—it has also impacted how we think. Have you ever caught yourself laughing at a delightfully cute moment with your kids, only to find yourself mentally composing captions for the picture you're snapping and thinking about how many "likes" you might get? Maybe that's just me. Or have you observed the shift in the way we think about and define community? Community used to be

the people you were surrounded by in daily life—your family, your local church, your co-workers, and your neighbors. Has the fact that you can virtually participate in any community via the internet changed how you think

about the communities you are a part of? Now we think of community as something we find, craft, and build for ourselves instead of something we are placed into by birth and circumstance. Do these shifts in thinking impact the way we disciple our kids?

One potent example of how changing technology directly impacts our faith life is encapsulated in the phrase "online worship." When I was a child, I would not have known what this phrase meant, but my children have lived through a pandemic. When the world

stopped, and everything shut down, out came the laptop on Sunday morning. They watched the pastor and musicians going through the service online. I worked hard to maintain as much normalcy as possible that spring, as I'm sure many other parents did. I printed out children's bulletins, lit candles, said the responses, and sang the hymns with them. But it never felt completely like church, and they knew the difference.



It was so much better than nothing: we saw the names of our church family members in the comments thread, we heard the Word of God preached, and it was comforting. It was also easier in many ways than taking four kids to church. Yet to me, it felt wrong, disembodied, and sad.

As our children experience life in a world different from their parents and grandparents, it can be easy for us to fall into one of two camps. We can be tempted to ignore the impact of technology, going with the flow and hoping that the changes happening in our society as a result of technology are good or minimally neutral. Or we can be tempted to wring our hands with despair, feeling inadequate to speak into what we see as negative and dangerous social shifts. Rather than succumbing to this temptation, we have an opportunity to teach our children discernment in this area.

With each new technological choice—watching a service online or attending church in person, giving a child a smartphone, allowing children to play video games

with people on the internet, permitting social media accounts, etc.—we want to come alongside our children and help them evaluate these options with godly wisdom. We can teach them to ask these questions:

- What does God’s Word say about this technological activity?
- What is helpful about this technology?
- What bad things might happen as a result of this technology?
- What opportunities might this give me to love and serve my neighbor?
- What opportunities to love and serve my neighbor might I miss if I engage in the world through this technology?
- Would my goal in using this technology be better achieved in a face-to-face setting?



Using online worship as an example, we can acknowledge that streaming a service is helpful for the elderly, shut-ins, and members who cannot attend church. In March of 2020, for better or for worse, that was almost all of us. Amid a crisis that none of us could have imagined, online worship was helpful in that it allowed the Word of God to be preached in each of our homes. This reminds me of Paul's letters from prison. Paul expressed his desire to be with his fellow Christians in person, yet when he was unable to do this due to physical constraint, he gave them the gift of the Word of God using the technology of the day (written letters and Roman-built roads!). Many faithful pastors spent a lot of time and energy putting together online Bible studies and devotional content at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic out of love and a desire to serve their neighbors, and it was a blessing to many.



When we think about the negative results of online worship, or what opportunities to love and serve our neighbor might be missed, we must recognize that the most glaring omission in online church is the ability to receive Communion. In the Lord's Supper, we confess that Jesus is truly bodily present, giving us His very body and blood to eat and to drink, as hosted in and by the bread and wine. Through this body and blood of Christ, Jesus makes us His Body. The very word *Communion* points to this reality: the Sacrament of the Altar is fundamentally Jesus' way of being with us in the flesh and of uniting us to Himself and to one another. When we realize this, the concept of an online worship service marks a categorical shift away from the biblical understanding of what it means to be the Body of

Christ. When we participate in something online, we participate only intellectually and emotionally—we do not participate bodily. Our God is a God of the incarnational, bodily, physical realm. Jesus did not save the world in a spiritual, intellectual sense, but physically. He did it by being born as a man and bodily dying and rising again. In His Supper, He meets with us bodily once again and unites us to Himself. We want to teach our children to seek Jesus in the places where He has revealed Himself to be—in the pages of Scripture and the Sacraments. When we look to God's Word, we see that it is important to continue to gather physically in worship each week so we can receive the forgiveness of sins, be strengthened in our faith, and participate in the community of the Church.

As parents, we will face significant decisions regarding our kids and technology, but technology itself is not the issue. Our calling as we raise children is to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). This means modeling for them how to translate their values and what they know of God's Word into new situations they face. What does it mean to love God and love your neighbor in the way you use a camera? interact on social media? keep the Sabbath holy? utilize potentially addictive devices? There may be no obvious one-size-fits-all guidelines for technology use. But as we raise our children in homes infused with God's Word and His love, we steward technology, as we do all our possessions, by considering whether each use helps us love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Finally, we must remember that our children are not our own. They are God's children, first and foremost, and He loves them and cares for them. He has given them parents as a gift for their benefit and provision, and to that end, we are thoughtful and careful in how we bear this responsibility. But ultimately, we cannot place our hope in our own ability to shield our children from the world or provide them with the perfect childhood or ideal environment. We are imperfect, the world is a sinful place, and we will fail. But we have a God who calls our children by name and has promised to be with them always. We do not need to fear technology or the future because Jesus is the king of all things. ✝

Prayers

FOR FAMILIES

Lord God, heavenly Father, You designed families at the creation of the world. You gave us one another so we can have joy and love, protection and security. Thank You for the blessings of our family! Today we ask that You keep our family from harm and danger and that You protect us from sin and evil. Forgive us for the times we have let someone down, offended a loved one, or acted out in anger. Grant that we may always know You and trust in Your faithfulness, that we may have life everlasting through Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Lord and Giver of life, look with kindness upon the fathers and mothers of these children and upon all our parents. Let them ever rejoice in the gift You have given them. Enable them to be teachers and examples of righteousness for their children.

Strengthen them in their own Baptism that they may share eternally with their children the salvation You have given them; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

First prayer from *On the Go Prayers* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 58.

Second prayer adapted from *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 372.



Technology

at School

BY AMY BIRD

“It’s not that I know *how* to do it. It’s that I have the *tools* to figure it out,” Carmen Yagow says about using technology in the classroom. Carmen serves as a fourth-grade teacher at Our Savior’s Lutheran School in Springfield, Illinois, where every child has access to a Chromebook.

Her growth mindset is invaluable as a teacher. It’s how she’s equipping her students to thrive in a digital world.

“When I started teaching ten years ago, students were mesmerized by technology in the classroom—by a simple SMART Board that I could click on. Now, it’s old news to them. They’re so versed in technology, it’s a second language for them,” Carmen says.

The advancement of technology continues to radically shape society, and that includes its impact on the education system and students.

“Phones and devices are put into their hands as babies, so it’s just a language they speak,” Carmen says.

The job of teachers is to help their students learn how to use technology productively and safely. Along with teaching traditional academic subjects, teachers like Carmen are also helping students develop skills to navigate the digital landscape. They’re growing competencies like how to evaluate a website and determine its credibility and teaching social skills on how to respectfully agree and disagree with peers through a secure, online classroom portal. Imagine the positive influence young people could have in modeling for the rest of us what it looks like to have respectful interactions online!

Perhaps more than anything, technology in the classroom gives students increased ownership over their education. They can explore more and go deeper on topics of interest—and through learning styles that fit their needs. Gone are the days of limited teaching methods, mainly through auditory learning. Now a lecture can happen alongside other modalities like video, artwork, music, and personalized projects.

The use of technology in the classroom has also supported students in the faith. When Our Savior’s was closed during the pandemic, chapel time went from a school-wide assembly to a more intimate class-wide prayer-and-discussion time. Students could share how they were doing both on video calls and in response to written discussion posts, and then pray for one another. In this way, Carmen could engage both extroverted

and introverted students—those who prefer to talk out their feelings and those who best process their thoughts by writing them out. Creating a space and means to connect interpersonally allowed students to go deeper with one another and share honestly about the challenges they experienced. We see this same intimacy in many of Paul’s letters when he could not be present with the congregations but opened his heart in writing (Romans 1:11; Galatians 1:6–8; 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5).

After each faith conversation, Carmen posts supporting videos and resources on the school’s student portal. It’s been encouraging to see her students go back and rewatch the videos again and again. On top of that, students are sharing what they’re learning with their parents! Technology has equipped her students to bear witness to their faith at home with their family members as they model what’s been shared with them in their digital classroom.

Carmen also notes that “the wealth of information the kids have is very eye-opening for them.” Because access to information is easily available from their tablet or phone, they’re much more informed about current events. With that information comes an increase in awareness of the brokenness and pain of this world. But rather than pretending the realities of sin don’t exist, this, too, serves as an opportunity to engage students and help them develop a biblical worldview with Christ at the center of everything.

“The world has changed. Education has changed. Kids have changed. We need to meet them where they are,” Carmen says.

That means making the classroom a safe space so they can talk about the brokenness they see, affirm the emotions they feel, and take these burdens to the foot of the cross.

Because ultimately, it’s not knowing *how* to encounter every situation in life before it comes; it’s having the *tools* to figure it out. And with a Christ-centered education, students are being equipped through today’s technology to tackle anything that comes their way. ✝



Influencing Children's Identity through Electronic Technology

BY JOHN ECKRICH, MD

Little has had a more dynamic impact on contemporary culture than electronic technology. I would argue that electronic technology is our feeble human attempt to copy God's astonishing creation of our capability to communicate who and whose we are. This creative package includes the brain and its extended nervous system components, including the eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and communication modifiers—memory, emotions, and body posture, to name a few.

Electronic technology has afforded us fascinating ways to store and organize knowledge, access facts and figures with a finger touch or voice command, and make wildly rapid computations unthinkable easy. We can even communicate what we are about without being in

the same space as our neighbor, looking into their eyes or heart, or reading their body language to see if they understand our message. One could wonder if we will need a brain at all someday. Let Alexa do it!

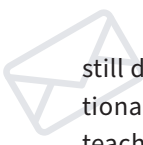
Clearly, and especially for our children, technology has gone from an informational instrument to an essential part of not just how they function but who they are.

We are living in the days of "Generation Swipe." Swiping down an iPad has become a core physical characteristic in children as young as 2. I've seen it in my two preschool-age grandchildren. It's scary. Not only do I think we are losing cursive and spelling proficiency, but I also wonder how long it will be before our children

can barely write their name by hand. Electronic signature, please.

My concern extends beyond a lack of physiological development to the very heart of our young people's perception of identity. From the point we bring our children to the baptismal font, we pray by faith that the Spirit would continue to mature their identity as children of God. Yet even within the Christian household, we are realizing that electronic media is often profoundly channeling our youth into negative or inaccurate understandings of self-image: Am I pretty enough? thin enough? tall enough? smart enough? handsome enough? Idealized or photoshopped imagery provides exceedingly false expectations. Much of this effect is because our teens are






still developing their full behavioral, intellectual, emotional, and social attitudes and responses. As Luther teaches us in his Small Catechism explanation of the First Commandment, our youth can easily let social networks replace God as the thing they fear, love, and trust the most.

Furthermore, electronic media makes it difficult for our teens to differentiate reality from fantasy. Our younger teens may not be mature enough to think with discernment, especially regarding subjects like violence or sex.

Additionally, average teenagers use devices to send and receive information more than six hours each day. This robs them of the chance to spend time playing sports, doing community service, reading, and communicating face-to-face with family and friends. We know that children who use media heavily are at risk of becoming socially isolated, which is a challenge to identity.



These are merely a few of the deleterious effects of electronic technology on our children and their understanding of their identity as part of God's family. Have you had enough already?

Ding! Notification: We have Jesus to anchor our mentoring of youth. What resources does the Spirit give us to raise children to have resilient and Christ-centered identities, even in this challenging time?

Our children must be surrounded by caring, compassionate, faith-filled, and accountable adults—and friends. Don't let your child become isolated and immersed in media. Begin setting boundaries for media time and content consumption in preschool and reinforce them as your children grow up. Something as simple as setting a basket on the kitchen counter and depositing all electronic devices (including the adults') during breakfast and supper is a start. Replacing bedtime media viewing with a heart-to-heart review of the day and prayer time is helpful. Bedtime is a wonderful time to reinforce baptismal identity.

Remember that you, a Spirit-inspired mom or dad, are the most important source of information, attitude, values, understanding, comfort, and security in a child's life, especially regarding self-image, sexual behavior, drugs, relationships, and wellness. Remember that the way we as parents steward our bodies, minds, and spirits remains the best way to communicate this to your

child. Are we eating healthy, maintaining weight and exercise, resting, avoiding drinking alcohol excessively and smoking, shunning pornography and excessive media use ourselves? How are we as parents interacting with our family and neighbors? Are we glorifying God with our spoken communication? Children reflect the images of the adults around them, especially their parents.

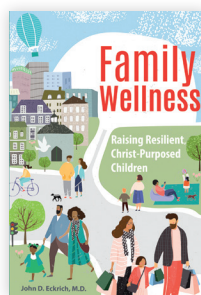
We can provide opportunities as a family to serve at church, school, and our communities, working alongside our youth rather than vegging out in front of the TV or computer. Be physical rather than sedentary.



Know your children's friends. Period.

No matter where you find yourself on the spectrum of parenting, calm and compassionate conversations with children, especially teens, remains the first line of family wellness. Do this face-to-face. Furthermore, be aware that you have professional counselors, therapists, physicians, pastors, teachers, and youth ministers as part of your influencing team. Electronic technology can positively help you effectively connect to these human resources. Use all these gifts to create an identity characterized by purposeful and missional living centered in Jesus. ✝

FAMILY WELLNESS



All portions of your family's well-being are important, from their physical health, to their spiritual. Learn how to take care of their entire well-being by using five core value sets and God's Word. Find this title and others listed in *Lutheran Life* at cph.org/lresources.

Q&A WITH SETH HINZ

BY AMY BIRD



Seth Hinz, director of brand, marketing, and creative at Pathfinder Church in Ellisville, Missouri, has dedicated the past fifteen years of his life to communication at Christian organizations (including at a university, nonprofits, a youth ministry program, an LCMS district, and a church and school). In the middle of Seth's college career, Facebook launched. The scope of communication, especially church communication, changed

forever. And with it, so has Seth and his approach to communication. Remember that this interview looks at technology from the point of view of the pastor and church leaders. Members will see technology from a different perspective. Parents must help their children learn how to discern the good and bad in digital technology and value the benefits of face-to-face worship, Bible class, and meetings that digital technology never can.

Can you briefly share what the role of technology is in the church in general?

My perspective on technology and the church is primarily shaped by my use of it. Its role in the church is to enable and enhance communication and connection. Churches can now participate in the weekly rhythm of life, no longer being relegated to weekend worship only.

The printing press led to personal printers. Sema-phores led to telegraphs. Megaphones led to micro-phones. Technology builds on itself. Technological advancement should be observed and studied—yes—but never feared.

What are common obstacles congregations encounter when considering how to use technology to aid in ministry?

Technological change is moving so fast that we can barely see it. When considering how technology can aid ministry, an obstacle many churches face is waiting until the timing is perfect. The timing will never be perfect. The rollout will be full of headaches and failure. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't start. Rather, it means today is the perfect day to start!

For example, many churches don't start a social media account because they don't know what to post. They wonder if they can keep up with its demands. The great

thing about social media is that you don't have to get it right. A ministry win is "presence"—meaning we are with others. Online life is intertwined now with offline life. By being present on social media, we become aware of others. We see them. We can share in their victories, their challenges, their lives. Is it without conflict? Nope. But the line between offline and online is getting blurrier and blurrier. We need to get over the fear of failure.

The learning curve for technology is another obstacle. In my mind, however, that's born out of the first obstacle: us sitting on the sidelines. The sooner we accept that our communities are increasingly online, the sooner we can take the first step toward connection and begin learning.

How have you seen technology help congregations share the Good News of Jesus Christ over the last two years?

I administrate a Facebook group called Lutheran Communicators. Our community doubled nearly overnight. We're now approaching three thousand members.

I loved what I saw. Church leaders around the world were asking questions and sharing best practices. Churches from all corners embraced each other for the sake of the Gospel. Out of necessity, church after church popped up online, livestreaming for the members and whoever else might join in.

Technology made that possible. Still, to this day, churches have members who are unable to return to in-person worship. And still, to this day, churches are meeting them where they are, embracing the distance and keeping the community connected. Zoom prayer groups and Bible studies as well as private church Facebook groups are a couple of ways we've seen the community stay together and thrive through shared experience.

What tech lessons have you learned over the last two years as you serve at your church and support church communicators across the Synod?

One of the biggest things I've learned is that people are filled with grace. Technology fails. Equipment breaks. Livestreams go down. But the people of God are thankful for their churches, especially those who make the effort to stay connected.

I've learned that technology acceleration certainly means we can reach more people. Our pews might seat one hundred, but YouTube seats are unlimited. That said, healthy relationships take intention. So while digital engagement is a near necessity, we should never forsake or abandon the impact of one-to-one outreach. At a time when technology reigns and I can talk to ten different people in less than ten seconds, the act of writing a letter to one person may have more perceived value.

What opportunities do you see for technology to further support the life of the church in the future?

As more people adopt virtual reality technology, new opportunities will arise. I envision I'll be in my retirement home one day where I'll be able to sit in a pew at church while wearing a set of VR goggles.

As our community increasingly flocks to online worlds and experiences, we have the opportunity to adapt to that change or abstain. I pray that there will be a few faithful early adopters to lead the charge into that space. King of Kings Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska, for example, recently led "A Very VR Christmas" service in 360.

Augmented reality presents opportunities for deeper learning too. I picture unique services in the future where congregants can wear special glasses that

add visuals to the sermon. A pastor is explaining the Israelites wandering through the wilderness and taps a button. Suddenly you see families walking behind the pillar of fire. Just imagine how that could enhance someone's understanding of the biblical account, as well as their understanding of how great our God is!

Ubiquity is crucial to our next steps. For example, QR codes came about in 1994, and years later communication professionals began using them with greater frequency. But then they died out. Why? Because they weren't easy to access. End users needed a smartphone as well as a special app to scan them. However, smartphone makers then integrated the QR scanning functionality into the standard camera app. They became easy to use, and they've made a comeback.

Virtual and augmented reality will eventually integrate more smoothly into our lives. More people will need to purchase hardware to access the content. As hardware adoption increases, the path of technological advancement will eventually merge with the path of digital content creators.

What role do you think technology should play in the life of the church? How do we harness what's helpful and steer clear of what's not?

Simply put, never before have we had the opportunity to stay connected every day of the week. Coming out of a time where we've been forced to remain at a distance, people long for connection—to see and be seen. Flesh-and-blood ministry is the goal; there's something about the way God has wired us for physical presence and connection that cannot be replaced.

Yet technology gives us an opportunity to create pathways to the community. The next generation values digital communication. When we encounter new technology, instead of thinking through ways to translate an offline experience to online, we should simply ponder on "What does this make possible?"

To be blunt, the care we put into our online presence is translated by those searching for connection as the care we will provide to them. If we aren't there, believe me, someone else will be. It's an awesome opportunity but also a responsibility. The LCMS has much to offer our neighbors. I pray that we can all take one step forward toward our community today. ✝

"The care we put into our online presence is translated by those searching for connection as the care we will provide to them."

TECHNOLOGY AND REST

BY AMY BIRD



For all the benefits and advantages technology has—and will continue to have—on our daily lives and culture, it's not without its need for limits. Like all good gifts, technology can be misused, abused, and harmful. This is especially true of our use of social media.

Do you ever find yourself doing a quick check of your favorite social media app only to realize minutes or maybe hours have gone by with your eyes glued to your phone? Most of us want to be less connected to our devices but somehow can't seem to create that space.

So we need to ask ourselves: Is my constant connection to technology—and specifically all that's available at the touch of my phone—good for my soul? Is it grounding me in thankfulness and joy? Is it helping me grow in Jesus' love?

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 reminds us that there is a time for everything. That includes a time to connect and a time to disconnect. A time to be with people and a time to be alone. A time to be informed with the news of the day and a time to be uninformed. A time for loud and a time for quiet. A time for engagement and a time for withdrawal.

I've found the 1-1-1 principle to be a helpful guide when considering how to steward the gift of technology alongside rest, social connection alongside private reflection. It goes like this:

Take a break from using social media:

One hour each day.

One day each week.

One week each year.

This allows our hearts and minds to quiet and slow, creating space for stillness, prayer, and reflection. Following the 1-1-1 principle helps create an ongoing rhythm for media consumption, an aid for remaining grounded and Christ-focused in a chaotic world.

One Hour Each Day: Choose a waking hour outside of work to intentionally put your phone away. Perhaps you start the first hour of your morning without your phone or the local news. Instead, use it as a time spent with the Lord in His Word and in prayer to Him. Or maybe your one hour is in the evening before the kids go to bed. It's an uninterrupted, TV-free hour of quality time spent connecting with your family. Whatever hour you choose, set intention around it as a sacrifice unto the Lord—and as a balm for your soul, which is bombarded all day with the notifications and pings of the world.

One Day Each Week: God's command to remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy, or set apart, isn't just a recommendation. While the use of technology can aid in our study and experience of scriptural teachings on the Lord's Day, what would it look like for you to spend one day each week without your phone? Maybe this isn't possible because of the responsibilities placed upon you during this season of life. Perhaps you try for half a day or one day each month. The focus here is to develop routines that help us use our time intentionally and purposefully.

My husband and I have sought to keep a 24-hour Sabbath since the beginning of the pandemic. While that doesn't happen every week, we've seen the fruit of slowing our pace, quieting outside voices, and spending intentional time celebrating, delighting, and resting in God's word. Our phones stay in the office for the day

(with emergency calls set on ring). The quiet and lack of stimuli can be uncomfortable as our bodies detox from constant connection. But the outcome is deeper thought, purposeful time, and increased dependence upon our Savior.

One Week Each Year: What would it look like to intentionally set apart one week each year to go without the use of your phone or internet? What benefit might you gain from completely unplugging for an extended period? This kind of sabbatical creates space for deeper work or projects, and a longer time to be with the Lord, His people, and His creation. For my family, this includes spending a week together in the Northwoods—an area of the country where WiFi is still spotty. We enjoy taking in creation, fishing, hiking, eating good food, and engaging one another in thoughtful conversations that only seem to arise when other distractions are at bay. You don't need to find a place with spotty WiFi. Using airplane mode or the do-not-disturb function can silence your phone without you having to leave your house.

The 1-1-1 principle is just one way to explore what it looks like to remember the Sabbath Day and create rhythms of work and rest, connectivity and solitude. In the end, it's not about keeping this pattern perfectly but about caring for your body, mind, and soul. Just as Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath, so, too, technology was made for man, not man for technology. Taking breaks and finding rhythms for connection and reflection encourages us to maintain a balanced life—one that seeks first God's kingdom, abides in Christ's love, and knows true joy. †

PORTALS OF PRAYER APP



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5 Reasons Members Aren't Giving

Every church, regardless of size, relies heavily on donations. But the offering is more than just a donation to support various projects or meet certain fund-raising goals. And it is certainly more than a tax-deductible contribution. A sense of gratitude for God's gracious gifts is usually where most churches start, but keeping donors engaged depends significantly on your specific situation. You're working hard to make God's amazing grace clear to your church, so what's holding people back from giving?

Members Don't Have a Proper Appreciation for the Rich Theology of the Offering

1 Many members of your congregation think the only offering is their money. Offer ways for them to give of themselves by offering their time and talents to core missions as well. By doing this, your congregation will become more engaged in your ministries and feel connected as a community.

Look for an online platform that combines communication tools with eGiving options (<https://bit.ly/3Jak8JQ>) and can integrate them with your church-management software like Church360° and Shepherd's Staff. Bringing these pieces together into your tech strategy streamlines mission work.

You Aren't Offering Different Payment Methods

2 With the technology age and the rise of mobile phones and credit and debit cards, many members don't write checks or carry cash. They appreciate the option to offer their gifts to the Lord anytime and anywhere. Instead of making people come to church to share their treasures, go to them by offering online payment methods.

Offering a variety of payment methods will ensure your congregation sees that offering their donations is as easy and convenient as possible.

They Never See or Hear about Any Results after They Give

3 After someone donates a gift, show how the congregation put it to beneficial use. Storytelling is a powerful way to connect with your congregants. Instead of telling your congregation about the amount of money you raised, tell a story about how those gifts helped a local student attend college or

ensured local children had backpacks for school. Share these stories during services, in your church app, and in weekly bulletins. When your members see how their gifts are sharing the love of Christ and making a positive impact on their local community, they will want to continue to help.



You Aren't Giving Your Donors Enough Credit

4 It's easy to think your members are uninterested in parting with their treasures. Sometimes all they need to see is how they can help achieve your mission and ministries needs. Help them see that their donation makes a difference by using the church app to create conversations between members and church leaders.

They Believe They Can't Give If They're Not Attending Services

5 The shift to virtual ministry (<https://bit.ly/3uOxur0>) brought about by COVID-19 has changed how members interact with their church—and the offering. Remind your members how they can continue to honor the Lord and support your mission even when they're not attending in person. Offer options for giving online (<https://bit.ly/34xZ01s>), via text, or through a mobile app. Demonstrate the work your church does with electronic gifts from members by sharing stories during virtual services, through email, or via your church app.



Your church's ability to support Gospel ministry depends on the generosity Jesus stirs in the hearts of your members through His Gospel. Your ability to understand and adapt to your members' giving habits will help channel that generosity. The more you know about their motivations, the more likely you will succeed.



Introducing eGiving to your church offers more flexibility for your congregation. With the right eGiving provider, like Vanco, churches can offer multiple tools so members can donate however is most convenient, whether it's mobile or in person. Vanco was made for churches and is trusted by more than 25,000 churches to provide more than just a payment platform. Vanco provides an experience. Their solutions help churches meet financial goals that support their mission. ✝

VANCO
FAITH

About This Issue's Authors



Amy Bird is a writer and editor serving as the primary author of *Lutheran Life* and as a contributing author for various devotional resources. She studied communication and theology at Concordia University Wisconsin, and holds an MA in systematic theology from Concordia Seminary.



Brian Smith, MD, is an author, professor, and psychiatrist in Michigan with more than twenty years of experience working with children and their families. He has directly witnessed the impact of digital technology, especially social media, on the mental health of his patients. His Christian faith provides the vision and power to best help those in crisis, while feeling personally renewed through this service. Married to Sara and father to Brandon, Hannah, and Casey, he was a genius who could do no wrong until his own children became teenagers.

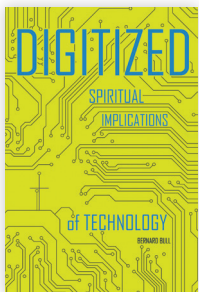


Christa Petzold lives with her husband and four children in Bartlett, Illinois. She has an MA in Theology, a BA in Mathematics and Lutheran Secondary Education, and is coauthor of *Male and Female: Embracing Your Role in God's Design*. She spends her time homeschooling, teaching theology, writing, and learning as much as she can about Church history. Find her at christapetzold.com.

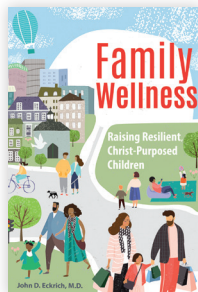


John Eckrich, MD, is a board-certified internist and gastroenterologist in St. Louis, as well as founder of Grace Place Wellness Ministries, a Recognized Service Organization of the LCMS that is focused on the bodily, mental, and spiritual wellness of professional church workers. He is an author and nationally recognized speaker on health and wellness. His book *Family Wellness: Raising Resilient Christ-Purposed Children* is published by CPH as a wellness resource and textbook for families.

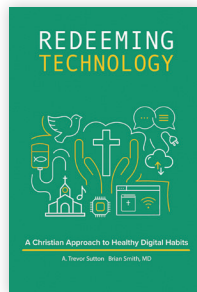
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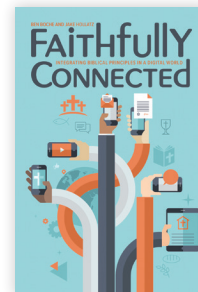
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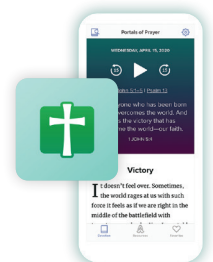
Family Wellness: Raising Resilient, Christ-Purposed Children
by John Eckrich, MD



Redeeming Technology: A Christian Approach to Healthy Digital Habits
by A. Trevor Sutton and Brian Smith, MD



Faithfully Connected: Integrating Biblical Principles in a Digital World
by Benjamin Boche and Jacob Hollatz



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