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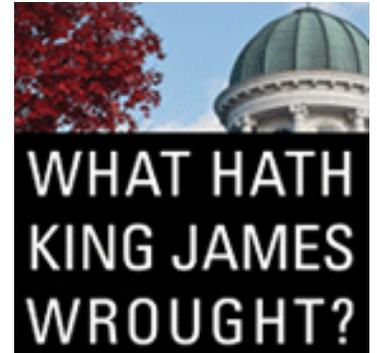
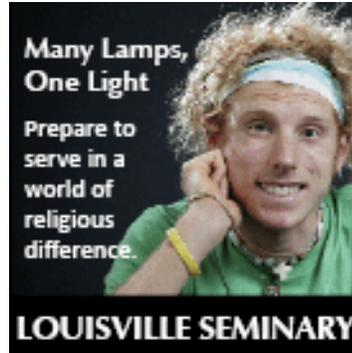
The social network

Feb 15, 2011 by Dennis Sanders

Via Scott McKnight, I came upon this blog post by Richard Beck about how Facebook is killing the church. Yes, you heard me: Facebook is killing the church.

The difference between Generations X and Y isn't in their views of the church. It's about those cellphones. It's about relationships and connectivity. Most Gen X'ers didn't have cell phones, text messaging or Facebook. These things were creeping in during their college years but the explosive onset of mobile devices and social computing had yet to truly take off.

So why has mobile social computing affected church attendance? Well, if church has always been kind of lame and irritating why did people go in the first place? Easy, social relationships. Church has always been about social affiliation. You met your friends, discussed your week, talked football, shared information about good schools, talked local politics, got the scoop, and made social plans ("Let's get together for dinner this week!"). Even if you hated church you could feel lonely without it. Particularly with the loss of "third places" in America.



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Dennis Sanders is a Disciples of Christ pastor in Minneapolis. Diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome in 2008, he blogs about faith and autism at Questor Pastor, part of the CCblogs network.

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But Millennials are in a different social situation. They don't need physical locations for social affiliation. They can make dinner plans via text, cell phone call or Facebook. In short, the thing that kept young people going to church, despite their irritations, has been effectively replaced. You don't need to go to church to stay connected or in touch. You have an iPhone.

Sure, Millennials will report that the "reason" they are leaving the church is due to its perceived hypocrisy or shallowness. My argument is that while this might be the proximate cause the more distal cause is social computing. Already connected Millennials have the luxury to kick the church to the curb. This is the position of strength that other generations did not have. We fussed about the church but, at the end of the day, you went to stay connected. For us, church was Facebook!

I think this post exposes one of the weaknesses of the modern-day church, and reminds us what church is all about. Churches are of course made up of humans, so they are social communities, places where people connect with one another. Friendships are made at church. People find their future husband or wife at church.

The problem isn't that churches are social communities; the problem is when that's all they are. In the heyday of mainline churches, congregations could get away with being a religious Elks Club. But what happens when new communal spaces like Facebook come around? Well, people don't need to go to a church to meet other people when they can do that on Facebook or Twitter or someplace else.

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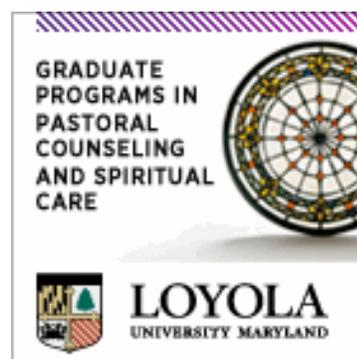
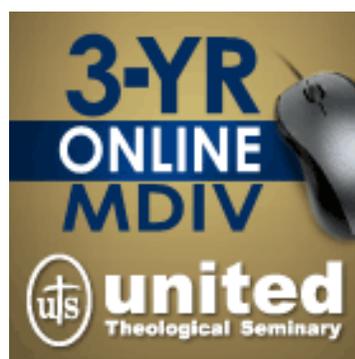
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Churches have to be places where we can connect with each other, but also remind us of the holy. They have to be places where we are formed into the likeness of Christ. Yes, they need to be places of social connection, but that can't be the main thing anymore. It never was supposed to be.

Originally posted at Questor Pastor.

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COMMENTS

Spiritual Formation

Posted by Anonymous on Feb 15, 2011 - 03:03 pm.

The social networking of today seems to create and foster an exteriorized life but where do we learn about the inner life, how to grow and nurture it? The Church must return spiritual formation at the center of its life. That is the one thing that only the Church can do. It is, I think, where the Church is most authentically itself.

Peace, Mike+

<http://interruptingthesilence.com>

Spiritual Formation as Central

Posted by Anonymous on Feb 22, 2011 - 07:51 pm.

I agree we(the church) could in the past get away with being the 'Religious Elk Club' - nice people getting together with some common religious ideas.

And we could also in the past get away with being the 'Religious Social Service Agency' - nice people getting together to



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help out the needy.

Now we have plenty of avenues for both of the above that don't require the religious part and so those folks don't need 'church or religion' to do what they really want which is community life and social good.

The only thing central to church is the spiritual formation of the inner life. If I want that I need real religion.

What about the mission of the

Posted by Anonymous on Feb 16, 2011 - 11:46 am.

What about the mission of the church? What about what God charges us to do? To feed the hungry, heal the sick, help the earth, stand up to injustice? If we blame something else, like the Internet for our own failings are we any better than a corrupt government? Social networkers are the protesters rebelling against a slack power source that has forgotten it's purpose.

The Church's Mission

Posted by Anonymous on Feb 24, 2011 - 06:44 pm.

Anonymous identified the mission of the church with feeding the hungry, healing the sick, helping the earth, and standing up to injustice? The church can continue to do those things, but so can any social service agency. Who will proclaim the gospel, the message of salvation, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name? No social service agency is doing that.

The Rev. R. Don Wright (ELCA)
Hatboro, PA

I think this gets close but

Posted by Anonymous on Feb 18, 2011 - 07:08 am.

I think this gets close but then misses the point. It is not that churches are social communities that now compete with a 'better'

way of being connected, so that we should now 'go back' to adding the holy to the mix. Rather it is that churches do not go far enough in being social communities. Being holy and being a social community is not a dichotomy. Unless we are not the right kind of community. The problem is that for so long churches have been very shallow communities, not essential ones. I will leave the cure to others more qualified.

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