# Pastoral Care in The DigITal World

A Reflection for the Church of
The Third Millenium

Gordon Wynne
Lachlan Cameron

Published by
Church of Ireland Publishing
Church of Ireland House
Church Avenue
Rathmines, Dublin 6

Designed by Susan Hood

# Table of Contents

# Group Members

THE WORKING GROUP of the Social Justice and Theology Committee (Republic of Ireland) adapts its membership according to the subject that it has in hand.

For the present booklet, the actual drafting members have been the core that is always present, drawing on a wide variety of knowledge and expertise partly acknowledged below and partly found in general publications.

The core members are:

**The Very Revd Gordon Wynne**
Dean of Leighlin & Chairperson of the Social Justice and Theology Group,
Old Leighlin, county Carlow

**Mr Lachlan Cameron**
Retired educationalist & Deputy Chairperson
Enniskerry, county Wicklow

**Ms Fiona Forrest-Bills**
Secretary
Ferns, county Wexford

# 1
# Introduction

THE CHURCH OFTEN GIVES THE IMPRESSION that it is sleepwalking into the digital era. The Church is quick to use the evolving technology of communication when it suits it. The Church also sees many of the dangers and risks inherent in the new digital world, and the new balance of power that this implies.

But the pastoral implications of this huge change in life seem inadequately understood and insufficiently acted upon. The current booklet is an attempt to redress the balance, to bring the whole pastoral dimension into the open and to suggest ways of coping with it: ways of bringing out the good and dealing with the bad.

# 2
# Technology as an Agent of Social Change

THROUGHOUT HISTORY THERE HAS BEEN nothing like technology to bring about social change. All too often the impetus to change technology has been the need to gain advantage in war. However much those who muse and write about society may deplore it, altruism seems rarely the motive. When we look back over the early phases of human history, the change from the 'old' to the 'new' stone age, then to bronze and then to iron, all the time there is the driving force of military advantage. Nowhere is that better illustrated than in First Samuel's account of the state of affairs versus the Philistines in Saul's time, where we read that:

> *Now there was no smith to be found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, "The Hebrews must not make swords or spears for themselves"; so all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen their plowshare, mattocks, axes, or sickles; the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and one-third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. So on the day of the battle neither sword nor spear was to be found in the possession of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan; but Saul and his son Jonathan had them.*
>
> I Samuel 13:19-22 NRSV

Indeed the mythical power of the smith pervades much early literature. The smith appears in Genesis even before the Flood (Genesis 4:22), alongside the herdsman and the musician, so important was he. One of the worst difficulties of the exile to Babylon, much later, was that Nebuchadnezzar carried off from Jerusalem 'all the craftsmen and the smiths' (II Kings 24:14). Nearer to home, it cannot surprise us that of the waves of people who have entered Ireland the two who are considered the most influential are those who brought new technology and new weaponry: the Celts who brought iron and the Normans who brought the longbow.

Examples can be multiplied. The ironclad steamship arose during the American civil war and took tremendous steps forward to become the Dreadnought battleship of the early twentieth century, under the impetus of worldwide competition for imperial domination. The aeroplane became a practicable proposition because of the needs of the artillery spotter during the First World War. The e-mail originated in 1971 in the US military-industrial complex, where computers began to be connected together in a network.

Often the greatest leap forward is made when one

technology cross-fertilises, as it were, with another. The technique of wine-pressing in the late middle ages was wedded to that of dye-making for legal purposes, and printing was born. The church loves to recount the vast importance of that change, how the Gutenberg Bible and the expertise of the early printers generally altered the whole structure of ecclesiastical authority and became the backbone of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The present age, the age of Information Technology (IT), is no less radical in its implications, possibly more so, and the church needs to reflect on that fact.

# 3
# The Capability of IT

I NFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INCREASES our capability by many orders of magnitude in several areas of life, so much as to bring about what is known not simply as a big difference but as a 'quantum leap' or 'paradigm shift'.

To take some examples, consider verbal communication, whether oral or written. Orally we can now communicate freely, irrespective of location or occupation at the time. The old constraints of time and space have been swept aside. The five centuries of domination of the printed word is over. Print is only one competing possibility. Consider the passenger sitting in the train reading a newspaper and talking on a mobile telephone. What a diversity of technology. Rail transport is a sixteenth-century idea, the modern style of train was developed in the nineteenth-, the newspaper is an eighteenth-century invention, while the mobile telephone originates in the late twentieth-century. Recall, also, that in the experience of that passenger his electronic conversation will take precedence over his 'ordinary' one to the passenger in the next seat. 'Ordinary' interaction is relegated in people's priorities. Avoid the person in the street on their mobile telephone or they will bump into you. On

the other hand, the passenger in the train has saved hours of his business's time and maybe made much more money than he otherwise would.

Interactivity over the internet is important enough to merit a few thoughts of its own. Broadcasting has always taken account of the receiver's response, and politics have always been sensitive to the voter's views. But in both of these areas there has been a huge empowerment of the many rather than the few, thanks to the internet. Interactivity in broadcasting is now many orders of magnitude more quick and widespread than it ever was, and that profoundly influences the character of what is broadcast and how. A particular application of this principle applies to politics, where he or she who is master or mistress of the internet is becoming master of the election too. Interactivity of this sort is set to grow in leaps and bounds, both in quantity and in technological variety, as time goes on. It represents a huge increase in democratic empowerment, consolidating and extending the influence of the ordinary person as never before. It can only reinforce our culture of suspicion, our intolerance of top-down authority, and the triumph of consensus and post-modern plurality. The more that digital technology advances in cheapness and compactness, the more the trend will

accelerate. All who are involved in education, including the Church, should take note.

We all know that a picture is worth a thousand words. Once again we live in an iconic world, a world dominated by the visual image. It was so in pre-literal times, when the stained glass window, the sculpture and the decoration of the church conveyed truth to us. Still more so, and in a totally different way, does the icon to this day bring divine grace to the Orthodox Christian. But now we speak of icons in another way as well. Princess Diana of Wales (1961-97) was, or still is, regarded as an 'icon' of her time, because of her visual appearance. Countless other images are seen as 'iconic'. Visual imagery is immensely influential, often subliminally. The Reformation distrusted the eye in comparison with the ear, partly because ancient Israel was enjoined to 'hear' the Lord although she could not 'see' Him. That distrust is well and truly gone now. The capability of the hand-held device is already immense. It can bring images of anything to us as quickly as we want them, and it is on the instant that we do want them, whatever they may be.

The world of sound is hugely enriched by IT. Our musical taste can be fed and indulged wherever we are and whatever we are doing. Quality, range and choice

know no limits in comparison with what was available to former generations. The virtual world that can be entered so easily through IT is as much for the ear as for the eye. Never have the senses been so nourished as now. They are, we could say, fed to the point of satiation, and it is all a matter of choice, not dictated by circumstances beyond our control.

There is a special rural dimension to the utility of the digital world. Wherever there is a special rural dimension there is a special interest for the Church of Ireland, it being an organisation whose heart and soul is so much a rural one. Where the ordinary, real community is small, scattered or weak, so does the potential importance of the internet community become greater for people's quality of life, whatever age group they might be in. It is excellent that there exist organisations like Carlow Rural Information Services Project (CRISP). For further information about CRISP see:<www.crisp.ie>, to bring skill and information to country people in matters of this sort.

# 4
# What is Reality?

DEEPER QUESTIONS INEVITABLY ARISE. What is 'real' and what is 'virtual'? Where is the boundary between real experience and the cyber-world? Is there such a boundary? Are we gaining insight through the new technology into the nature of ultimate reality?

The eighteenth century saw the universe as a clock, at around the time of that vital invention, the nautical chronometer. The nineteenth century saw the universe as an engine at just the time when steam was becoming dominant. Should we see the universe as a vast computer system or network on the analogy of IT? Many people think so. Some versions of what is known as 'the strong anthropic principle' suggest that we are tiny computer programmes within a vast system of software. Important avenues of thought open up if, in those terms, we think about the remarkable fact that the universe does appear to be somewhat comprehensible to the rational human mind.

The Church must never cut itself off from the contemplation of the nature of God and the universe. There is no doubt that the new technology, like many

of its predecessors, gives rise to reflections in this area that are much too important to be ignored.

# IT in the Moral Universe

IT IS NOT SIMPLY THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE that bears upon this matter, but the more immediate requirements of the moral universe press in upon the church also. Like all human instruments, IT is morally ambivalent, capable of being used for good or for ill. It is useful to consider these moral dimensions under four headings, to cover major areas of perennial human interest: power, money, sex and time.

Information technology, like all other technology, brings about a transfer of <u>power</u>. In the case of IT, the transfer is from the old to the young and from the poor to the rich. In many former human eras, and in many civilisations, power lay with the aged, and they enjoyed respect because of their wisdom. In times of lower technology, also, the poor wielded power in terms of their labour, a fact well known to trade unions and employers in the past. The sage and ploughman between them had much to contribute to society. But IT brings power to cleverness not wisdom, to those who can invent and operate robotic and other automated systems rather than those upon whose hard hand work life once depended. The younger you are, the better access you have to electricity, and the stronger your ability to control and

manipulate IT, the more power you now have. Those in poor and developing countries, and those whose wisdom and experience are not directly relevant to the digital world: power is no longer theirs even as far as it once was. Even the power of social cohesion and community sanction is greatly reduced, everywhere. The digital world is individualised and atomistic: it is fissile and fragmented. Delicate structures like the family and the village are greatly threatened. 'Real', or non-electronic, encounters are put at risk and downgraded in many ways, whether between individuals or between people and things that they have loved and valued in the past.

There is huge new power to make and save money. Digital networks are the basis of the financial world itself, indeed in an important sense they are the financial world. Electrons move much more quickly and cheaply than pieces of paper. Retail business is increasingly based on the internet, to the advantage of everyone. Paradoxically the rising world volume of book sales now largely depends on electronic shopping, even more in the second-hand sector than the new. Dot.com swindles and scams abound, but the business potential of IT shows sustained growth worldwide. This has huge implications for the creation and distribution of wealth: a movement whose speed

and universality far outperforms the Industrial Revolution itself.

Personal and relational networking using digital methods is a huge, indeed sometimes dominant, reality in the lives of countless people, especially – in world terms – the rich and the young. Bebo, MySpace and Facebook all testify to this. Virtual society to no small extent complements and often replaces the old ranges of friendship. There are great blessings here. Remoteness and distance are no longer barriers to communication, to the joy and relief of many. Much can be done to improve understanding across the world. There is also huge potential for misuse. It is cheap, quick and highly effective for bullies to operate in the cyber-world. Vulnerabilities are multiplied a thousandfold, especially when it comes to <u>sex</u> and other possible exploitation. The power of youth and glamour in the contemporary world feeds on this to an extent that has almost no limit, especially when children have computers in their bedrooms. Sadly there is an obverse side to the coin of fun and joy. The Internet Advisory Board publishes excellent booklets on subjects like this, and for further information see <www.iap.ie> (especially its publications page).

<u>Time</u> is a resource that is dramatically economised by

the use of digital technology. It was the same with the coming of the steam engine. Journeys by land or sea had been unpredictable in timing and duration and dependent on wind or sinew. With steam they took a fraction of their former time and were timetabled. That made a huge difference to world trade and business, and the digital revolution does so once again, only still more dramatically. There are benefits from this in every sector of human life, but as more and more can be achieved per hour, so is more and more expected. The expectation usually outruns the actual achievement, and the result is increased stress. The natural rhythms of the day or the year are farther than ever from the actual world of work. Also, in the area of pleasure and entertainment, gratification is expected to be instant. There can be no steady ripening of the fruit on any tree. 'I want it, I want it all, and I want it now': that is the cry. Whither patience, reflection, consideration or maturing, imaginative insight?

In the world of work, is instant availability of the worker at any time and in any place a price worth paying for flexibility in office hours and the ability to work from home? Less commuting may mean easier transportation planning, but will there be significantly more loneliness and depression as a result?

There arises the general point that those whose world of thought and action has IT at its centre are often noticeably better at deductive reasoning than inductive. Propositions like 'If X then A but if Y then B' are easily translated into action at the computer keyboard and the deductive process is an integral part of life, well grown and well watered. But the more speculative, inductive and indeed imaginative processes of thought are much less well nurtured, and the person used to IT can be notably immature and undeveloped in the judgment that life often requires. This can be quite problematic in the work of a body such as the Church and requires sustained attention. A basic requirement would be to ensure that there is no further attrition in the study of the arts and humanities in third and fourth level education. Some regions of the country, notably the south-east, have a serious deficit in this area already, and the matter needs to be addressed. Also needed is a positive commitment to the simple cultivation of good manners, so often sacrificed to the insistent call of technology.

There is a particular pastoral difficulty for a constituency that often has a low priority in Church life: older, but not elderly, adults. These people are neither young nor old, neither poor nor sick. Unlike

their parents, they have had to come to terms with IT in order to survive socially and commercially. Unlike their children, they do not naturally and effortlessly work with IT, yet everyone expects them to do so. Stress is the result, often considerable and often hidden.

Information Technology is systemic in all things. It runs like blood through the arteries of everything. An excellent example is the recession of 2008. Debt could only have been first incurred and then securitized on the scale of the preceding boom by means of the digital network worldwide. The speed of economic downturn would have been impossible prior to the computer age, and thus 2008 is quite different to the Wall Street Crash of 1929, largely because of the new technology.

# 6
# Communication

D EVELOPMENTS IN COMMUNICATION have had a profound effect on human social relationships. The most important, the faculty of speech, which is believed to have been largely influential in the development of the human brain and human society, has perforce gone unrecorded. An important consequence of this was the development of writing and particularly the alphabets, in which instead of ideograms a small number of symbols (only 20 plus) is used to represent sounds. In this sort of 'synthetic' writing, words can be built up without having to learn a large number of ideograms, thus making writing and reading more accessible. The use of paper (attributed to the Chinese) was more convenient than stone or clay blocks or expensive vellum, but a major development (attributed again to the Chinese, but reaching Europe by the 15th century) was the printing press. Previously the process of writing out texts by hand had not only been much slower but was also far less accurate as each successive scribe was liable to include further errors of transcription (not of course that even modern printing is totally free of such errors). The resulting spread of books enabled the diffusion of knowledge and new mindsets which were the basis of

the renaissance and, together with the increased access to the Bible, lead to the Reformation.

Further developments such as linotype, offset printing, and even modern electronic printing are really only refinements of the original Gutenburg machine, but enabled faster and cheaper production leading to the explosion of pamphlets and daily papers in the $19^{th}$ and $20^{th}$ centuries. These developments made printed material available not only to an élite but increasingly to the ordinary people. To some extent, this may have been a consequence of, but it was also a spur to, increased literacy.

By the $19^{th}$ century and the improvement of roads, came an increase in the ease of physical communication. The steam engine, originally used for such tasks as pumping water in mines was applied to locomotion on railways and even in cars and motor cycles. The internal combustion engine using petroleum products has enabled modern air travel (in a more effective form than the hot air balloon). We should not forget also the invention of the bicycle to which Steve Jones, professor of genetics, and one of the best known contemporary commentators on evolution, has attributed a sudden increase of the homogeneity of the British gene pool. All this has

meant that not only have physical goods been more widely spread, but people have been able to interact at first hand with individuals and cultures that the forebears would never have known.

Later with the invention of radio and its offspring television ideas can be even more widespread. In the past was the phenomenon of 'vertical transmission' of knowledge, whereby information (and ideas) were passed from the elders to the young, (and were filtered in the process). Now we have 'horizontal transmission' whereby these ideas are spread directly to all and the young, watching more television, are often more informed than their elders. These processes are carried to an extreme by the internet and mobile telephones. Indeed there appears to be a large overlap between them where the young are often more adept in these areas than their more culturally constrained elders. These devices can lead to an even more widespread diffusion of ideas and knowledge, but knowledge can be true or false, ideas useful or dangerous (and sometimes both) and here is no 'filtering' mechanism to distinguish them. There is also the risk of all communication being of this sort, and even friends being virtual rather than real.

Thus we see how these technological developments

have lead to massive changes in society, bit they have their attendant dangers and it is doubtful whether we have developed social mechanisms to cope with them.

# Conclusions

I T MAY BE WORTHWHILE to marshal some thoughts for the Church under the headings of the three most significant moral questions of our time: the stewardship of the planet, the conquest of poverty, and globalisation. Each of these areas of primary concern to the Christian community is powerfully affected by digital technology and each would benefit from careful consideration in its own right.

### 1. Stewardship of the Planet

At the higher levels of science, mathematics and philosophy, the implications of the digital world are profound indeed. They also have a considerable impact on the person in the pew and on the moral choices that the person makes day by day. The most obvious area of potential benefit is to maximise electronic communication and so cut out the use of paper, time and fossil fuels for the energy needed for the movement of people, goods and information in the traditional ways. Also, the digital media have huge potential for informing people of the underlying questions they ought to consider when trying to be better stewards of creation. As educational tools the DVDs and other things like Powerpoint have no equal in effectiveness.

## 2.    Conquest of Poverty

This can be influenced by giving power to those who do not have it now in IT. It would for example be a great blessing to the elderly, especially those who live alone, if they could be educated and persuaded to use IT to communicate with one another. It is possible to imagine a variety of Bebo which might be designed for older persons to use, and by means of which people – who might be immobile or homebound – could be put in touch with one another and with the world in which they grew up, by means of visual images and sound recordings. Such a change would represent a considerable cultural change, but it could well be possible to make rapid progress, and in particular, make good use of the grandparent-grandchild relationship along the way. The young might make much the best teachers of the old. It is interesting to speculate how the current teenagers will construct their world when they themselves are old. How digital a world will it be?  It may be that in future it will be considerably simpler for the elderly to have access to the benefits of the digital world. If voice and touch replace mouse and keyboard as the interface, then everyone will benefit.

As regards the poorer regions of the world, a mobile telephone and electricity network may form the

necessary infrastructure, together with satellite communication and such receivers as might be necessary. The huge upcoming economies of China, India and South America have already developed a strong business incentive in this direction already, but a more charitable outreach might be necessary to bring comparable benefits to Africa and other parts of Asia. Educational and other aid programmes, such as are supported by the Bishops' Appeal, could be helpful in furthering this aim. There is a strong risk of impoverishment by people becoming unfamiliar with art and nature unmediated by electronics, and indeed unfamiliar with their own neighbourhoods. This should be actively worked against, for young and old alike. This is a matter for education at home, all the way from primary to quaternary level.

### 3.     Globalisation

Information Technology is an inextricable component of this phenomenon, both as a beneficial aspect of it and, sometimes, as its dark underside. The more that people can be genuinely and comprehensively informed about other countries and ways of life, the better. A particular difficulty is the unsupervised and unregulated nature of the internet. It is difficult to distinguish between official, authorised and trustworthy information, on the one hand, and

suspect or downright harmful material, on the other. Better means of protection of the public from unscrupulous persons are required in this as well as many other areas of interest to those who are weak and vulnerable.

# 8
# Summary

FEW AREAS OF LIFE AND EXPERIENCE remain untouched or at least profoundly influenced by IT. In this, the digital revolution stands in the line of technological changes as one of the most recent and most influential chapters in a long story.

There is the same potential for good or evil as in any other human tool. In the case of IT, however, the stakes are higher than ever before, because of the huge power and potential available.

The Church needs to be fully aware of the main dimensions of this revolution, just as it was conspicuously aware of the implications (for example) of printing and the industrial revolution. There are practical things that can be done to help, especially the weak and vulnerable people at home and abroad, and encouragement can be given to the vast potential for good that still has to be unlocked.

# Bible Studies & Themes for Discussion

D IGITAL TECHNOLOGY IS IMMENSELY POWERFUL in the moral universe at advancing the general progress of technical change and in communication.

These things can all be studied in the Bible, and the following themes might be considered:

### GOOD AND EVIL

Discuss, for example: Genesis 4, Deuteronomy 11, Isaiah 45:7, 54:16-17, Romans 8.

### TECHNOLOGY AND WAR

See: I Samuel 13, 17.

### COMMUNICATING THE TRUTH

See: Ezekial 13, Job 12, John 3:1-20.

# 10
# Historical Studies

THE STUDY OF HISTORY also provides rich examples of how technology has changed all life. Here are some subjects, the evolutionary stories of which will provide further discussion themes:

● Printing

● The Renaissance

● The Reformation

● The steam engine

● The electric telegraph

● Radio

# 11
# Contemporary Needs

I F THIS BOOKLET IS STUDIED, there are many hints and ideas to be found as to how, specifically, the digital technology could be brought to bear on parish life.

Search these pages, think and talk about, for example the following subjects:

● Children

● Youth

● The elderly

● The poor

● Sustainability

● Transparency and accountability

● Eco-Business

# 12
# Interactivity

**An example of an interactivity in broadcasting and politics for further study:**

Study and compare, for example, the most recent USA presidential election of 2008, with all former presidential elections. Think out the importance of the digital world for this election, and predict how it might ultimately affect Irish politics.

A good way to work at this would be to ask – electronically of course – a young person you might know who lives in the USA, whether they or their friends were involved in President Obama's campaign. So widespread was the participation that it should not be hard to find a way into someone's experience and its significance for the future.

# 13
# Some Individual Perspectives

IN THIS SECTION we invite regular users of the IT medium to comment on their experiences.

**Revd Ian Poulton,** Rector in diocese of Dublin & blogger

THE REVD IAN POULTON, Rector of Killiney (Ballybrack) in county Dublin, writes a daily blog <www.forthefainthearted.com> – from his suburban parish.

These are his thoughts on the values and challenges of the Digital Age:

"LIKE THE PRINTING PRESS, the Internet provides an opportunity for publishing the best as well as the worst of material. It is undeniable that the opportunities for the dissemination of undesirable material have become limitless, yet to judge the Internet on such a basis would be like judging the publication of books and magazines on the basis that some have used the print medium for the worst of purposes. The Net, as it has become known, is a tool of communication; what it communicates is determined by its users.

Approaching the use of the Net from a Christian

perspective, there are innumerable opportunities for sharing the faith, finding resources for church life and even for pastoral care. The Church of Ireland realized at an early stage that the Net offered significant opportunities to resource parishes and clergy with news and liturgical material. The facility to access weekly readings and all the liturgical material from the Book of Common Prayer has proved a boon for many clergy. There has also been the opportunity to tap into the liturgical and spiritual riches of many and diverse other traditions from around the world.

Perhaps one of the less explored dimensions of the Net is its use as a tool of Christian pastoral ministry. Such ministry may be intentional and formal, such as the many websites that provide material and contacts for those seeking help in a particular situation or crisis.

However, recent years have seen the proliferation of 'bloggers', writers of 'weblogs' or journals on the Internet. The readership of even the most modest of these often runs into hundreds every month and, in some cases, may run into many thousands. The opportunity to communicate with numbers significantly larger than the typical Church of Ireland parish is one that should be approached with caution and responsibility. Difficult issues may be explored in

a non-threatening and interactive way, many blogs have the facility to post comments, or to communicate directly with the blogger. The opportunity of anonymity is sometimes important to people who may be endeavouring to work through painful memories from the past.

The Internet is both anarchic and egalitarian and does bring with it dangers as well as opportunities. Church responses to the Net have often been to acknowledge that there are opportunities and to focus on advising on website design, which would be like a publisher focusing on the paper and binding of a book without asking questions about its content. Little attention has so far been devoted to what websites and blogs exist; what issues they raise; and what ways the Church as a whole might utilize the opportunities available."

**Shane Tucker**
Church of Ireland Youth Department, blogger

SHANE TUCKER is an American who has lived in Ireland for the past nine years with his wife Christy, daughter Neve and son Aidan. He travels the island for the Church of Ireland Youth Department <www.ciyd.org> spending his spare time with 'Dreamers of the Day' <www.dreamtoday.org> – an organization utilizing the arts, spiritual disciplines, evocative speakers and symposiums to engage people in their journey with Christ. Shane can be reached via

the website, <shane@ciyd.org> or at his blog: <http://wwwdreamtoday.blogspot.com>

He writes:

"TECHNOLOGY IS LITERALLY DEFINED as *the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes'* and it most certainly has been applied to nearly every conceivable sphere of living with great effect. Not many aspects of our lives can claim being free from its influence. In truth, advances in technology have propelled humanity to the place in which it resides today making life that bit easier, broader, more effective and most certainly - faster.

Not every change technology has brought could be considered beneficial to society, but most are deemed so. The last of the changes mentioned above is considered by some to be the most dangerous to the (spiritual) Christian life. Author, philosopher and speaker Dallas Willard has been known to say: *'Hurry is the greatest enemy to the spiritual life'.* It seems that despite all of our advances in technological development, one thing we have not managed to save in any way is time. It still slips through our fingers at the same rate and seemingly the very thing we have created to save time, steals more of it from us. It must be common knowledge that there is just as much to do

or accomplish in life since recent technological advancements like the personal computer, if not even more. Much of the time we hoped to save by use of these systems and products is re-invested into other forms of technology like browsing and buying on the internet, watching films at home, previewing music and speaking to others around the globe for free.

The *missio Dei*, or mission of God unlike advances in technology has never changed. People were, and are still the priority of the Godhead. God has always been about (and will continue to be) reaching out to and redeeming creation (humanity included)! We, in the Christian context realise this as central to our faith and trust in God - *'God sent His one and only Son . . .'* God Himself has gone so far as to become one of us AND offer to reside within us (as the Spirit) in order to redeem and preserve His relationship with us. What other faith system has a God who makes Himself a servant of those whom He has created? Right at the heart of God is mission, a love that perpetually reaches out to the world. As those who are being transformed by this 'unbelievable' belief in a God who is Love, we also are invited into this mission of God (*missio Dei*) to partner in His work of redeeming creation.

Can technology serve God's purposes? How can it do

so? These questions rise to the surface as we explore living a life of faith in the twenty-first century. In the Western world, it is nearly impossible to escape the reach of technology - so how can we engage with it and utilise it for good? As we know, relationship is of utmost importance to God, therefore technology must always work toward facilitating greater connection and communication between human beings. Any ways in which it might be employed for the greater good we must explore. It is obvious that in sharing the message of hope with the world, technology has a large part to play through the internet (facilitating access to much of the globe) as we make information available via web sites, stay in touch with telephones (fostering otherwise impossible relationships), post parcels anywhere we choose (as in the work of relief agencies) and develop a greater awareness of other cultures. Information though is only part of the message that God invites us to share.

St. Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying, *'Wherever you go, preach the Gospel and, if you must . . . use words'.* Implicit within that challenge we again get a glimpse of the essence of mission, that it is primarily and foundationally relational. We must be in close proximity to share the *whole* story of God as it's written with our lives on a day to day basis. Never will

there be a time when in God's eyes, developing relationship will be superseded by other means of reaching out.  God has intended from the beginning to invite and involve His people in reaching humanity through breaking and pouring themselves out for the 'other' just as Jesus demonstrated.  Technology is of use to God only in so far as it works toward this end.  We see this truth displayed time and time again in our celebration of the Eucharist - God's invitation to join with Him in his work in the world - and when we hear the closing words of worship services, *'Go out in peace to love and serve the Lord.'*  and the response is: *'In the name of Christ, Amen'*.

May technology long serve the purpose of God in reaching out, in relationship, to redeem a world in need of Him.  It's just too bad that technology hasn't helped to stem procrastination . . ."

**Jack Deacon,** Student & Net surfer

JACK DEACON is in Transition year at school, and lives in rural Wexford. His journey to school takes half an hour's drive from his home, which is a much further distance than some of his classmates. He writes:

"I USE THE INTERNET and the World Wide Web to communicate and chat with my friends, to look at videos, listen to music, to play games on, and to find

out information for school or anything else I want to know about.

Bebo and MSN Messenger are two of the websites I use to chat to my mates. To use Bebo, you create a profile that tells everyone all about you and friends can leave comments on your profile. But I prefer MSN Messenger because it's instant. MSN is a programme you can download onto your computer and chat with any friends who have the same programme. It's very simple.

You Tube is another great place where anyone can find out about anything. It allows you to look up any of its millions (maybe hundreds of millions) of videos and watch them. It has videos of everything you would ever want to watch, including sports videos, music videos, 'How to' videos, and so much more.

The Internet is a great place where anyone can find out about anything. One of the best websites for information about anything is Wikipedia. This is an online encyclopaedia of knowledge. It has billions of pages to find out about anything and everything.

There are tons of good gaming websites out there. Online games are not as advanced as games on CDs

simply because they would take too long to load. So, there are loads of small, easy to play, simple games online that are fun and easy to find. Another way I can play games online is using my Xbox. Using a paid service called Xbox LIVE I can play games with people from around the globe whenever I like. I can also talk to my friends and download content and movies on Xbox LIVE.

I use the Internet every day and I think the same can be said for the vast majority of teenagers around Ireland – especially in rural areas. This has been made easier by the wider availability of broadband around Ireland."

# 14
# Acknowledgements