

Digital Technology and Faith Formation Workshop

On Thursday, June 24, 2010 Province 1 networks and affiliated groups were invited to a workshop called “EDS, Resources, and Digital Technology and Faith Formation”, led by Julie Anne Lytle, PhD. Julie is an Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Educational Technologies at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA. I attended as the communications liaison to the Province 1 ECW Board and as president of the Diocese of WMA ECW.

In preparation for the workshop we read Julie Anne’s wonderful article *“Moving Online: Faith Formation in a Digital Age”*, offered as a free download in Lifelong Faith <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/>, which I highly recommend.

Julie shared with us the different digital technologies that are currently available, and what is being used at EDS for their seminarians and for others who take continuing education distance learning classes. She talked about the fear of losing the benefit of face-to-face communication and discussed how they carefully evaluate what must be done face-to-face and what can be done online. To quote Julie’s article, *“With the hope of developing sustainable models for proclaiming the good news and making Christians, many are developing hybrid or blended models of community life that incorporate both face-to-face with online interaction.”* Through EDS, Julie is available to consult on web conferencing and integrating digital technologies into faith communities.

During the course of the day Julie posed some real life questions and offered suggestions about how to integrate these new communication tools to best meet the needs of church communities. She said a careful evaluation should be made to identify the tools available and understand the opportunities and limitations of each tool; then the last step is a three-stage process she refers to as, “Message, Method, then Media”. This process is *“designed to help communities avoid the ever-present potential of letting the “tail wag the dog.” In an environment that fosters the development and deployment of a dizzying array of technological innovations, pastoral leaders risk choosing a popular medium only to realize that it cannot assist the community in meeting its mission. By starting with message, then moving through method and media, faith communities can avoid chasing the latest fad and exerting a lot of time and energy in the wrong direction.”*

A few things to think about:

- 95% of 18 to 28 year-olds belong to a social media network
- 10 % of couples who married last year in the United States met through social media.
- If Facebook were a country it would be the 3rd largest in the world with 400 million users.
- The fastest growing segment on Facebook is women age 55-65.

Having a church presence on the web to share our faith and evangelism efforts to advance the cause of Christ will give a soul to social networking.

With the rapid change in digital technology and communication we now have a generation of people who were born before TV, radio, and air travel, along side a generation of people who have grown up with the personal computer, cell phones, texting, Twitter and Facebook; we are at a crossroad, a cultural shift. The challenge is how the church can integrate the new communication technologies while not excluding those who can not or choose not to use digital technology, so that ALL will be welcome at the table.

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