



**eMinistry Basics:  
Making Your Web site  
a Daily Part of Church Life**



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### Davies Owens

Davies, the Executive Director of BlueSky Ministries, brings a wealth of ministry experience, partnerships and passion for connecting the church to a postmodern culture via innovative technology solutions. Having served over ten years as an ordained minister in both small and large churches, he not only understands the challenges the church faces in reaching today's culture, but he has also piloted a number of breakthrough ministry methods including Soulocity, an online community building tool for breaking down the time and space barriers that inhibit biblical community.

Davies' current work with BlueSky Ministries focuses on innovating and proving fresh and effective new ministry tools and strategies, such as JoePix. This "Photo Evangelism" strategy uses digital photography to engage people for Web-based ministry. It has been embraced by major church and para-church ministries around the world. Before working with BlueSky Ministries, Owens worked as the Director of Church and Community Development for Christianity.com.

His doctoral work focused specifically on using the tools of the Internet to enhance face-to-face relationships in the local church and in small groups. He and his wife, Holly, have a daughter and two sons. They live in their home town of Atlanta, Georgia.



**M**ost churches are no longer wondering if they should have a Web site. In fact, the vast majority of the 300,000 churches in this country have some basic Web presence, and many churches are building out the third or fourth revision of their site since it was first launched years ago.

The real question for many in the church today is, “How can we maximize our Web site so that it will directly impact the day-to-day operation of our church?” To date, most churches have focused their Web efforts primarily on the mechanics of actually building and managing the site. Decisions regarding which tools and content managers to use dominate discussions.

Obviously, these factors are key issues, and for most churches there is still vast room for improvement. Even

with a comprehensive site plan and strategy (see the ACS white paper “Effective Web Strategy” for details), church leaders are often challenged by how to fully leverage the potential of their Web site to do more than simply display the static information of service times and location. Additionally, these leaders are often challenged with having to give convincing evidence that the Web site is truly an asset and is worth its cost in time and dollars.

“An effective eMinistry is comprised of people who are committed to leveraging the tools of the Internet for meeting practical, daily needs of their local church.”

### eMinistry Success Story

Four years ago, a church with a budget in the millions was spending less than \$45 a year on its Web presence. Even with \$100,000s being spent on a television broadcast each Sunday, the senior leadership did not understand or value the potential of an eMinistry. The church Web site was continually out of date and in no way reflected the opportunities at the church. Yet, in less than a year, the church quickly became known nationally for its effective online ministry, appreciated by long-term members and visitors alike. What brought about the change?

A group of concerned church members and staff formed an eMinistry team. They called themselves “Project Noah” because, like Noah in the Bible, they knew change was inevitable. The Project Noah team knew that Internet-based resources were beginning to “rain” down, even though, like Noah of the Bible, they were jeered for thinking so. (continued on page 2)

This paper provides a vision and a plan for developing an active and effective eMinistry in your congregation. An effective eMinistry is comprised of people who are committed to leveraging the tools of the Internet for meeting practical, daily needs of their local church.

eMinistry teams should be well-versed in the almost limitless ways that the tools of the Internet can be used, and they should be prepared to meet with various church leaders to teach and demonstrate the possibilities to them. Many of these practical suggestions will be examined in this paper.

Starting an eMinistry is often the most difficult part. Obstacles such as lack of vision, budget, time and technological understanding are just some of the challenges that churches encounter when starting an eMinistry. Practical suggestions will be made for how to resolve these obstacles.



An eMinistry that makes a difference is one that is around for the long haul. How do you ensure that your eMinistry quickly becomes a part of the ongoing operation and culture of your church? Specific examples are offered for ways to make eMinistry a valued and appreciated part of the church's overall mission and ministry.

“eMinistry can be a valued part of your church's overall mission and ministry.”

By reviewing this paper, you will become equipped will provide you with practical suggestions for building and sustaining your eMinistry. Stories and statistics will illustrate the potential of the Internet for providing ministry from and to your church.

“The Web site is a tool that enables a broad range of traditional ministries to occur.”

### What is eMinistry?

eMinistry is defined as “a team of people committed to leveraging the tools of the Internet for meeting the practical, daily needs of their local church.”

## eMinistry Success Story

*(continued from page 1)*

These determined staff and volunteers formed a plan, which included the hiring of a “Web evangelist,” someone who would both know the technology and have a heart to teach each department how to best leverage the new technology solutions. With the plan in hand, the team went to a several key individuals as well as a small local foundation for financial backing of their eMinistry plan.

After the first year, with some obvious successes, the Project Noah team made a full report to the leadership of the church. The senior-level staff soon saw the impact that this new eMinistry was making on the congregation as well as its influence around the world. The next year this eMinistry team was a part of the church's budget and a vital part of the mission and ministry of the church.

Note in the definition of eMinistry, the focus isn't simply on the tools but on meeting the wide-ranging needs of the local church. Too often, churches focus on the “E” that is “Electronics,” rather than on the “Ministry”.

In fact, those who champion the use of technology and the Internet in the church are often seen as “techie”, rather than those who enhance and enable all aspects of the church's ministry.



Your church Web site is no more about electronics and technology than your sanctuary is about microphone systems and pews. The microphone and pews are tools that enable worship to take place.

The Web site is a tool that enables a broad range of traditional ministries to occur. eMinistry is about meeting the very real felt needs of the church's leaders and members, and enhancing everyday ministry life.

No ministry in the church should be comprised of just one person. Establish a formal eMinistry team and recruit volunteers. eMinistry is not just for the technologically gifted.

Ideally, you will have people on the team that represent the diversity of your congregation: singles and married people; youth and seniors; techies and non-techies. This is the ideal because it gives you a true sense of your Web audience and allows you to have a person to send as an eMinistry representative to each major department in the church.

These team members can provide teaching and

“The eMinistry team will quickly become one of the most valuable teams in the church.”

### An Outstanding eMinistry Team

Ginghamsburg Methodist Church in Tipp City, Ohio has one of the most impressive eMinistries in the country. The best news is that they actively encourage other churches to improve their online presence by providing eMinistry resources. They offer workshops on CyberMinistry that allow attendees to participate live or via the Internet. Sign up on their CyberMinistry Forum to discuss eMinistry with other church leaders from around the world.

[www.ginghamsburg.org/cybermin](http://www.ginghamsburg.org/cybermin)

Also, be sure to take a look at their list of links of churches around the country which are a part of their extended cyber ministry team. This is a great place to get ideas about what other churches are doing online.

[www.ginghamsburg.org/cybermin/sites](http://www.ginghamsburg.org/cybermin/sites)

encouragement to others regarding how to maximize your Web site and use Internet-based tools. In one church, several retired people who had learned about computers started offering a computer-training lab for others. Today there is a waiting list of people who want to be instructed.

You also may be surprised at how quickly people will offer to be on an eMinistry team once you start looking for volunteers. There are a lot of people who will never volunteer for the nursery but who will be the first to join an eMinistry team.

Technology is far from being a cure-all, but you might be surprised at how many day-to-day issues around the church can be improved by technology-based solutions. The more ways that eMinistry meets a broad range of needs, the more likely the eMinistry team is to gain value and support from the leaders and members of the congregation.



**O**ften the “digital divide” between the technology people and the rest of the church staff is only widened when the eMinistry team can’t see beyond what is interesting to them personally. Effective eMinistry understands the felt needs of the church. As Ernest Hemingway once said, “Bait the hook according to what the fish likes, not what the fisherman likes.”

While it may be fun for the Web programmer to see an animated Flash presentation online where the cross spins around on the screen and seven doves fly off, the rest of the staff may not share this enthusiasm as they are concerned with their own urgent issues.

What are those urgencies and how can eMinistry help? By answering this question, the eMinistry team will gain much greater credibility and support. Your eMinistry team should sit down with key church staff and leaders and find out their greatest burdens and daily ministry challenges.

The eMinistry team will quickly become one of the most valuable teams in the church as they help to implement viable and effective solutions. You might be surprised at how many ways eMinistry can serve the church’s goals and needs:

### Reaching Unchurched People

**Challenge:** Bringing new people into the life of the church. For some congregations, this urgency is met by the active training and mobilization of evangelism and mission teams. For other congregations, the focus is on welcoming and connecting with visitors.

This is important as more and more people are opting out of local church fellowship and traditional church altogether, creating a real burden felt by church staff and leaders.

**eMinistry Solution:** The good news is that people are as spiritually hungry today as ever. More people are making their decisions about which church to attend and

even which faith to follow based on what they see online. See the statistics in the table on this page for a reminder of what seekers are looking for online.

Make sure your Web site is addressing the needs of the visitor. You may think that the dinner menu for Wednesday night Fellowship should go on the homepage of your site, but a person who is trying to find out if Christians have answers for basic life questions may quickly go elsewhere if their needs are not addressed up-front.

Can someone who is trying to understand how to have a relationship with Christ get an answer from your site? Why not add an entire section to your site for the seeker? How about providing them with a form to submit theological or personal questions? Invite a non-Christian to take a look at your site. Does anything appeal to them?

### Religious Seekers’ Online Activities

You may be surprised at what people who are going online looking for religious answers are actually doing. Ask yourself this... are people finding these answers and resources at your church Web site?

- Looked for information about their own faith 67%
- Looked for information about another faith 50%
- Emailed a prayer request 38%
- Downloaded religious music 38%
- Given spiritual guidance via e-mail 37%
- Bought religious items online 34%
- Downloaded sermons 25%
- Sought spiritual guidance via e-mail 21%
- Looked for a new church 14%
- Participated in online worship 3%

[www.pewinternet.org/reports/index.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/index.asp)



Target your Web site to speak to the different audiences that could potentially arrive at it. The needs of young singles are very different from those of married seniors. The needs of youths are very different from those of parents of elementary-age children.

The homepage should be a launching pad to the sub-pages of your site where you can speak to each group. You may want to launch a separate Web site that would address seekers' questions.

Your church Web site doesn't have to be limited to church content. Some churches, in an effort to serve their local community, have added community news and resources (Little League schedules or local movie schedules and reviews, for example).

“People who would have never visited a church Web site will be clicking if you offer to meet their felt needs.”

Want to reach singles? Take out an ad in the paper offering dating tips or divorce recovery resources which point back to those specific areas on your Web site.

Want to reach young parents? Put parenting tips and a place for parents to submit advice online at your site. Take out a short radio ad from a station for moms in your area. People who would never have visited a church Web site will be clicking if you offer to meet their felt needs.

If you are really serious about reaching specifically those who are unchurched, you may want to build a separate Web site. This way you can make sure all the content is relevant and appealing to someone outside the church. You can also be more creative. One church wanted

to reach single moms, so they established a support group and a mom's morning out program. Next, they marketed through traditional mailings and newspapers to area residents inviting them to visit their single mom's Web site to find out more. This Web site was completely dedicated to the needs of single moms and has proven to be a great recruiting tool for the church's single mom ministry.

### Making Friends

**Challenge:** We are a culture in which people are strangers in the pews. Even those who are faithfully in the church every Sunday often feel disconnected from others at the church. Visitors who don't feel welcome and who don't know people are far less likely to return.

**eMinistry Solution:** Add a member and staff profile section to your Web site. Profile new and old members of the congregation along with staff (with their permission, of course). Add a photo and their biographical sketch and spiritual story. Consider profiling a new staff person every week.

You may already have a staff listing on your site, but consider reporting on the funny and unusual facts about the person beyond the standard fare of the year they graduated from seminary and where they have previously served.

Also, make sure new members are profiled. Post their faith stories and testimonies and give site visitors the ability to email them. (For security purposes, you can create a form to avoid having to list personal emails.) People love reading and learning about other people!

### Increasing Communication

**Challenge:** By the time the announcements are over and the coffee and donuts have been served, there is never enough time to fully discuss the Bible study material. And how do you inform the class about someone being





ill on Thursday when waiting until next Sunday might be too late?

**eMinistry Solution:** Add a message board to your Web site. A message board allows people to discuss issues of their choosing either publicly or privately.

Each person goes to the church Web site, logs in, and has the ability to post questions and responses to the comments of others. Members of the online group receive an automatic email informing them that others have responded to their comments.

“Offer live chat events featuring respected speakers, authors, or musicians. It is far easier to arrange for them to be available on the phone than to ask them to visit your town.”

Add an email distribution list. Don't overlook the obvious. Make sure group members have one another's email addresses so that they can email specific needs, prayer requests and updates to one another between the times they are physically gathered.

“Offer live chat events featuring respected speakers, authors, or musicians. It is far easier to arrange for them to be available on the phone than to ask them to visit your town.”

### Engaging Speakers and Authors

**Challenge:** From time to time churches will pay to bring in a well-known speaker or respected author for a special service or event. This is not only expensive but also a

major logistical undertaking. Although these major events are valuable, there are other ways to expose your people to opportunities that will cost less and be simpler logistically.

**eMinistry Solution:** Offer live chat events featuring respected speakers and church personalities. It is far easier to arrange for the speaker or author to be available on the phone for an hour than to ask them to take several days and visit your town. Advertise a live chat session on your church Web site.

Members log in (use a password protected area if you want) and can type in questions to this speaker during the “live one-hour event”. Someone from the eMinistry team is on the phone with the speaker (they could even do this from home) and asks him or her the questions that are posted online.

As the speaker responds, the eMinistry moderator types in the speaker's responses. This process makes it simple for the speaker. Another variation would be to have interested members call into an 800 number where they can listen to the speaker live while at the same time post questions via email or chat. The moderator submits questions to the speaker. That Christian band might be willing to do an hour-long chat or phone interview even when they are too booked to actually play at the church!

### Improving Sermons

**Challenge:** OK, this might be a touchy subject. Nonetheless, the reality is that most ministers not only welcome feedback from their messages, but also encourage listeners to engage in further study. Ministers generally want to make sure that people can easily access their sermons after Sunday morning. Many churches have all of the Sunday school classes study the text that the minister preached on the previous Sunday. But is there another way to encourage further study?



**eMinistry Solution:** Add a message board to your Web site and instruct your minister to invite people from the pulpit to go online and respond with comments or questions about the sermon.

“Convenience makes a big difference in today’s culture. Offer a form on your church’s Web site where people can register or submit payments quickly and easily.”

For those who want to hear the message again, make sure you have the sermon available online to either be ordered and mailed as a CD or tape or, even better, available as a live audio stream or a downloadable MP3. Some companies offer these services at a reasonable price.

Online access to sermons allows people to hear specific messages on topics relevant at that moment. After a death in the family, a person is more likely to want to hear the sermon on grief from last year. eMinistry can offer a solution!

### Increasing Donations

**Challenge:** In today’s world, fewer people than ever carry checkbooks or cash. Also, many people want to designate their gifts to specific ministries in the church rather than to the general fund.

It’s not uncommon for a person to have the intention to give but to be simply too busy. And when they are ready to give, they may not have their giving envelope or even the right address to mail a donation.

Many ministers accidentally go home with a check in their pocket because people who did remember to write the check forgot to put it in the plate and gave it to the minister on the way out the door, or even in the parking lot. It happens!

**eMinistry Solution:** Convenience makes a big difference in today’s culture. Offer a form on your church’s Web site where people can register or submit payments quickly and easily. Add an online donation tool to your church Web site. Be ready to provide information to your site visitors and your church staff regarding site security as well as potential costs, such as setting up a merchant account. People will be grateful for the convenience. And as a bonus, they can potentially accrue frequent flier miles for being a faithful giver!

“People will be grateful for the convenience of an online donation tool for faithful givers.”

In today’s busy world, the easier the process, the more likely people are to use it. Additionally, many Web-based donation tools will allow a person to set up automatic monthly payments with their credit/check card or direct drafts from their checking account.

### Cutting Meeting Times

**Challenge:** Want to put a smile on the face of a weary staff member or lay volunteer? Tell them the next meeting will be half as long as usual. Meetings consume an enormous amount of time and often distract from critical ministry.

**eMinistry Solution:** Use a Message Board to post key topics from the upcoming agenda. Group members are asked to read and respond to those topics prior to the meeting. By the time the group meets face to face, many of the topics will have already been considered and a decision can be made much more quickly.



## Recruiting Volunteers

**Challenge:** No church leader would say they have enough volunteers for all of their ministry opportunities. Invariably, there are key jobs that need to be done around the church and never enough people to do them. The other reality is that individuals who are interested in volunteering may not be sure who to talk with or how to get involved.

**eMinistry Solution:** Staff and members can submit a form on the church's Web site requesting a volunteer for a specific need. Volunteers can then go online, read about those opportunities and respond back that they would like to fill the spot. There are sophisticated search

and matching tools available, but even a simple "want ads" type of listing is a great place to start.

## Improving the Church Newsletter

**Challenge:** The inherent challenge with any print-based publication is that it can potentially be out of date before it reaches the intended audience. Additionally, it is difficult to target a general newsletter to speak to all people in the congregation.

## Who Is Your Web Site's Audience?

When it comes to a Web site, there are four possibilities. It is essential to know who you are targeting and to make sure your style and content reflect the audience's felt needs.

**Members?** The reality is that most church Web sites are really just for members, or at least that's what the content would tell you. This is obviously a key audience. So what do your members want? Certainly they want news, event information and registration, sermon audio, a place to submit prayers, and even the ability to ask a question of the staff.

**Past Visitors?** These are people who have already been to your church. They are interested in specific groups and resources that are available to them beyond the worship service. They will no doubt have theological questions as well as concerns about which programs are best for them or their children. Consider adding a FAQ section for visitors as well as a place to submit questions.

**Potential Visitors?** These people have never been to your church. The entire decision as to which church to attend may rest on how well you have spoken to their felt needs on your Web site. Obviously service times and directions are key, but so are the posting of theological statements and positions as well as profiles on your staff and leadership. Photos are especially helpful to give potential visitors a feel of the physical space as well and prepare them for their first visit.

**Non-Interested, Non-Churched People?** This category would, in fact, be the vast majority of people who are on the Internet. Looking for a church home is not their first priority by a long shot. Yet from the statistics (see page 5), people are searching for spiritual answers on the Internet. What would they think if they found your church site? How would they find it to begin with? Maybe put a top 10 list of questions spiritually searching people might find helpful such as, "Where was God on September 11th?" Depending on how intentional you want to be, you might build a secondary site that is principally an evangelism site. Take a look at [www.questioningfaith.com](http://www.questioningfaith.com); [www.joepix.com](http://www.joepix.com) and [www.hobbitlore.com](http://www.hobbitlore.com) as examples of outreach sites that serve to reach this group of people and ultimately connect them back to local churches and ministries.



A single adult may want to know when the next single's social event is scheduled but care very little that the nursery committee is meeting to discuss the playground addition.

**eMinistry Solution:** Allow members to opt-out of paper newsletters (a big cost savings) and receive e-newsletters. By putting a form on your Web site, people can request the general church newsletter (which could be a scanned pdf document of the actual print version).

By using e-newsletters you can create several versions and fill them with key content depending on the target recipient. This direct way of communicating may inspire staff to finally write those articles you've been asking for because they now will have some confidence that their constituents in the church will read in a timely fashion.

### Receiving Live Updates from Mission Teams

**Challenge:** Every year it seems like the same group of people sign up for the short term summer mission projects. Bulletin inserts and even a few up-front testimonies help recruit more participants, but what else can you do to ensure that as many people as possible catch the vision for participating and actively supporting mission work?

**eMinistry Solution:** Have the mission team send regular updates about their projects and work while they are away. Digital images can be sent along with brief stories, which can be posted on the church's site. You might be surprised at how easy it is to get Internet access in even the remotest areas!

One step better, at Sunday morning worship, show a short video clip of the team from the field. This idea works for youth away at a church camp as well. It's easy to post daily images of the event, and it gives parents some piece of mind!

### Making the Choir Sound Better

**Challenge:** Choir members can't make rehearsal from time to time. How can they find out about what songs are coming up for Sunday morning or even be able to hear some of those songs prior to Sunday morning?

**eMinistry Solution:** Sheet music can be scanned and emailed directly to the choir members for their review. Key music can be recorded, possibly even during practice, and then streamed to the choir members or band members as a downloadable file like a MP3.

### Caring for the Sick

**Challenge:** Churches are continually asked to adequately respond to the needs of members who are sick and often lonely, especially those who are homebound.

**eMinistry Solution:** Certainly there is no replacement for spending quality face-to-face time with a needy person. But a "ministry of presence" doesn't have to be exclusively face-to-face, especially for those who are able to access a computer from home.

Not only can homebound individuals hear the sermon and participate in the Sunday School discussions via the church Web site, they also can engage others on the church's message board who have faced similar illness. Why not offer a cancer support group online? How about grief support for those who have lost a loved one?

Want to minister to those who are ill outside the walls of your church? Why not offer online resources for people facing a certain illness or recovering from an illness? Don't overlook simple email lists as a way of keeping the church aware of specific needs and prayer requests.



## Helping Church Members Find a Job or a Plumber

**Challenge:** Churches are called to be the caring Body of Christ — a place where members can meet the very real needs of one another. So often within the walls of a church people are looking for a job while there are others sitting in the same congregation who are looking to hire someone. Likewise, there are people looking to hire someone for a particular service and are not sure who to trust or work with.

**eMinistry Solution:** By adding a “Directory of Services” or a “Christian Business Guide” on your site, you not only increase your Web site traffic and get exposure to other ministries, but you provide a valuable resource for members and visitors to post resumes and for companies to post job listings.

“Approach Christian business people about taking out ads on your site. You may be able to fund part of your Web site off of these donations.”

What better way to touch the daily lives of members than to list their business or service on the site for other members to see? Why hire a plumber out of the Yellow Pages if there is one who sits two rows behind you in the pew on Sunday morning?

Bonus Idea: Approach Christian business people in your church about taking out ads in the “Directory of Services” area of your site. You may be able to fund a significant part of your eMinistry with the donations by those wanting to advertise themselves.

## Know Your Internet Statistics

If you are meeting resistance with starting an eMinistry, chances are your senior leadership doesn’t understand the influence and impact the Internet is making in our world.

- 28 million Americans, or 25% of the Internet population, visit religious cyberspace, with more than 3 million seeking spiritual material on any given day.
- In 2003 there are some 762 million users worldwide, an increase of some 200 million in the last year alone. The United States has the largest number of people online with 145 million adults. There are 166 million Americans of all ages who use the Internet from home. Internet use is increasing for people regardless of income, education, race, ethnicity, or gender.
- In the United States, 90% of children between the ages of 5 and 17 (or 48 million young people) now use computers, making them the most wired demographic group in the world.
- The number of kids online has tripled since 1997— including almost a 40% jump in the last year alone.
- By the year 2010, 20% of the population or about 50 million people will rely exclusively on the Internet for all their faith-based news and experience. (George Barna, 12-12-00 “This Years most Intriguing Findings”)

The research is convincing. The Internet is a major influence in people’s lives and many of them are looking for information about spiritual and religious answers.



“Put games and materials online that kids or parents can download during the week.”

### Simplify Registration for Trips and VBS

**Challenge:** There is nothing more challenging than attempting to find the right person and place to drop off the registration form and deposit checks on a busy Sunday morning. Many people simply don't participate in events because they were either unable to physically come by the church or they were out of town by the deadline. Not to mention, staff would love to avoid being handed random checks and forms on their way into the Sanctuary on Sunday morning because someone didn't know where to drop them off.

**eMinistry Solution:** Add a form on your Web site where people can register and submit payments online using a shopping cart tool or something as simple as PayPal. It's not expensive to set up, and it can make an enormous impact. Convenience makes a big difference in our hectic culture.

### Helping Sunday School Attendance

**Challenge:** There are just those times when kids are not rushing out the door to go to Sunday School. Even younger children can at times be less than motivated. Christian educators work hard to provide creative, fun and engaging material on Sunday morning, but what else can be done to encourage kids to want to be in church and even bring a friend?

**eMinistry Solution:** Why not put games and materials online that parents or kids can download during the week to create anticipation about the upcoming week? For younger children, have coloring book pages of the

## Keep Your Web site Dynamic

There are three types of Web sites: Static, Responsive and Dynamic. Successful eMinistries understand the difference. The most effective and valued sites are always Dynamic in nature.

- A Static Web site is limited to one-sided communication of simple, factual information: service time, map to church, list of ministries, etc. There is no way for a person to interact with this information and, consequently, few people will return after the first visit. In a recent survey of some 800 church sites, over 90% were labeled Static. Attempting to sustain a vibrant eMinistry with a Static Web site is almost impossible.
- A Responsive Web site is one in which a site visitor can submit a response back to you. This may be in the form of a poll or a form that they fill out. It may be a newsletter request or a registration form for an upcoming event. Responsive sites are a vast improvement over Static sites in that they allow a person to interact, albeit in a limited way. Responsive sites stand a better chance of being sustainable long-term.
- A Dynamic Web site is the goal. Dynamic sites are highly interactive. They are updated consistently and give the user the ability to not only respond to forms but also to actively engage others through posting ideas on a message board, participating in online Bible studies and groups, and downloading audio and video streams of worship and teaching events.



upcoming Sunday's Bible story that can be downloaded and colored. Kids can be asked to bring in their artwork for display.

Older children can download pages that contain games or even contests that require the child to bring the completed form to church. Additionally, parents who want to play an active role in reinforcing what their children are learning can have access to the materials and lessons as well.

### The Internet's Impact on Daily Life

According to a report from the Pew Internet & American Life Project, who surveyed over 1,000 churches:

- 83% of those responding to our survey say that their use of the Internet has helped congregational life
- 81% say the use of email by ministers, staffs, and congregation members has helped the spiritual life of the congregation
- 91% say email has helped congregation members and members of the staff stay more in touch with each other
- 63% say email has helped the congregation connect more to the surrounding community

[www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc](http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc)

“Through the Internet, churches have an unprecedented opportunity to meet their own needs and impact the world.”

### Improving Parking (OK, it's a stretch)

**Challenge:** Many churches lack adequate parking. Visitors who can't find a place to park or who have to park far away begin their church visit with a negative experience. Members often don't understand other parking options and the importance of leaving the best spaces for the visitors.

**eMinistry Solution:** Post the map of your parking lot online and describe the best and worst places to park. Have a contest where you will post the license plate number of a member's car that was seen parked on Sunday morning in the correct member area. Give out a free dinner for two. This will improve parking and increase Web site traffic!



**A** dynamic church eMinistry doesn't happen without intentional planning and effort. Now that you are convinced there is a lot you can do with your site, you need to rally the support and vision of others on the church's staff. All too often it is just one or two people in a multi-staff church who see the potential. Here are some of the common "push backs" that you will hear in churches from people who don't see the potential of eMinistry.

### No Value

Trying to convince traditional, non-computer literate leadership in the church to endorse your eMinistry plans can be a daunting task. It is critical that you understand the impact the Internet is making on the general culture and its potential growth, as well as the unprecedented opportunity churches have to use the Internet for meeting their own local needs and impacting the world.

Unless you understand the value that a strong eMinistry brings to your church, it's hard to convince others to get involved. As you can see from the statistics on page 11, there is no question the Internet is here to stay and that it is a vital tool for ministry in the modern world. If the Internet for you is little more than a way to put your church brochure online, don't expect to have a very dynamic eMinistry.

Set up a presentation for the church staff, show them the opportunity and provide them with examples of the possibilities. One minister was convinced that eMinistry had potential after the third couple appeared in his office requesting to get married and said they had met online!

### No Budget

New line items in the budget can be tough to add, especially in this economy. The great news is that eMinistry can quickly pay for itself in both dollars and time. Before you attempt to convince the staff that more money is needed for your new site upgrades, do your homework.

One large urban church was spending over \$100,000 per year on its weekly newsletter being printed and mailed to its members. By giving members a chance to receive the newsletter online, more than \$30,000 was saved from the communications budget and applied to new Web initiatives.

*"eMinistry can quickly pay for itself in both dollars and time."*

Also, consider how eMinistry tools can offset the time it takes for personnel to do other jobs. In another large church a dedicated staff person had the job of identifying church volunteer needs and then calling people she thought might like to help out. By moving the volunteer needs online and allowing ministries to submit requests and volunteers to sign up, this staff member was free up to perform other duties that more directly impact the ministry needs of the congregation.

### No Security

Certainly there is a dark side to the Internet. eMinistries must be prepared to reassure staff and members that the church's Web site can be secure, especially when it comes to personal information, online donations and commerce. State your privacy policies on your Web site. Make sure that the church has a formalized document that regulates the acceptable use of the Internet for staff while on church property.

Go online and do a search on "Internet Acceptable Use Policy." Follow the links to see what others have done. Make sure filters are in place and that accountability exists. When it comes to managing your Web site's content, it's best to limit who has access to make changes to it by using a Content Management System like ACS Technologies' Extend platform to easily regulate access and privileges.





In most churches the 80/20 rule doesn't apply. It's more like 95/5 — where 95% of the people watch while 5% do all the work. Are you concerned that starting a new eMinistry will drain your limited volunteers? You may be surprised! Chances are there are people sitting in your pews who would love to volunteer at the church but figure there is no need for someone with an interest in technology.

In one church, the pastor made an appeal from the pulpit for an eMinistry vision that reaches the world for Christ and enhances the church's ministries. Over fifty people volunteered. Most of them would never have been interested in more traditional church volunteer requests like helping with the youth or singing in the choir.

Assign each of your volunteers to be the "Web Evangelist" for each of your departments. Their job is to cast the vision and to help implement Web-based solutions in their respective area. The Children's directors will be delighted that they don't have to "figure out the technology stuff", but in time they too will see the potential.

### No Time

You may be reading all these ideas and thinking to yourself, "I don't have time for anything new. It's all I can do to manage my off-line world!" The reality is that eMinistry can quickly pay for itself in time savings. For example, think how much time you could save if you, as the "Web person", were not daily distracted by endless emails requesting Web site content changes?

What if staff members could write their own content and all you had to do was to simply approve that content before it went live? That's just one of the many timesaving advantages to a content management system like ACS Technologies' Extend platform.

How much time could you save not having to stuff and seal all those envelopes for that big newsletter mailing? Hitting the "Send" button is a lot easier and faster.

### No Vision

Even if you manage to get the church excited about the value and the potential of a thriving eMinistry, it is still imperative that you present a clear vision of what you plan to do specifically as an eMinistry.

The strength of the Internet, with its seemingly endless opportunities and potentials, can in fact be its biggest liability. Before the first line of code is written, it is essential that the eMinistry team lay out a plan, preferably in multiple phases, that will form the roadmap for what will be done and by when.

Too often the vision gets muddled as the cart goes before the horse, or the chat room goes before the basic content management issue is addressed, as it may be. Don't randomly place "fun" tools on the site. Make sure that they meet an identifiable need and fit into your long-term plan.

And don't be afraid to help cast vision for your church. Too often the "powers that be" send the new vision statement and plan down to the Web person and ask them to post it online. Why not help the leadership team see a new vision for new ways to minister both locally and around the world using the tools of the Internet?

### No Technology Skills

At face value it would make sense to assume that you or your church staff would need to have a fair amount of technology training in order to start an eMinistry. However, in reality this assumption is not true. The technology tools available to churches have become increasingly easier to use, and at the same time more powerful in their impact.

A Content Management System, like ACS Technologies Extend, allows for a person with very basic computer skills to create and manage his/her Web site. You wouldn't wait to have worship until you understood how to build a piano, and neither is it necessary to understand how to program a computer to have an effective eMinistry.



**Y**ou've done it. You are now the hero around the church. You managed to update that Web site that was six months out of date and managed to get the staff excited about updating the content. Even the finance department is impressed with their new online giving tool. So is that it? Can you sit back and just let it run itself? No more than you can let the lawn just grow unattended in front of your church building. What can you do to make sure that your thriving Web site doesn't become a virtual ghost town?

“Bigger and faster isn't always better.”

### Start Small

One lesson learned after the Dot.com meltdown was that bigger and faster isn't always better. This lesson is especially true when you are trying to bring your church from 19th century technology to 21st century technology in a short period of time. Make sure that you have a long-term plan but have definite phases along the way (see “No Vision” on the previous page).

Maybe step one is adding a form on your site so people can submit prayer requests. Next month, add message boards, and the month after that add the ability to download the audio from sermons. Trying to do it all at once can be overwhelming to both the eMinistry team and to the church.

### Ownership

Who “owns” your eMinistry? Is it just you and a few faithful volunteers? Imagine what would happen if the senior pastor and leaders began to embrace and promote your eMinistry. Imagine if each department in the church “owned” a page of the Web site and was responsible for keeping the content fresh.

Want your Sunday School to start using the Web to post upcoming events, or use the message board to discuss the Sunday morning lesson? Make sure someone in the class promotes the site weekly. A live demonstration of the site in class is one of many ways to keep eMinistry in front of the church. Spend some time with the senior leadership and staff and encourage them to promote eMinistry in their respective areas. “Out of sight, out of mind” is very true with regard to eMinistry.

### Document Your Successes

Everyone loves before and after stories. If you put a form on your site for people to register for summer camp and you have an impressive number who use the tool to sign up, make a big deal about it. Write an article in the newsletter about how convenient and easy it was to use the form. Get some quotes from those who logged on and found it to be far more convenient than the old paper registration form. Was someone encouraged while they were recovering from surgery because of all the emails? Tell the stories.

### Train a Team

Don't build your eMinistry around only one person. It happens everyday. The pastor's son, who built the Web site, has his first date and the Web site isn't a priority for him anymore, and no one knows how to change anything on it. The volunteer guy who just started his own Web company promises to work the church “a deal,” but when his business picks up and there is no longer extra time in the day, the customers paying full price come first and the church Web site becomes ever more obsolete. Remember a sustainable eMinistry is run by a team, not an individual.



### Give People a Hook and a Prize

It's amazing what people will do for a free t-shirt or a gift certificate to a restaurant. Why not create some ongoing enthusiasm about your Web site by having frequent contests? We're not talking about online gambling, but something much more innocent! You could have an online scavenger hunt where you have hidden a small icon somewhere on your site (maybe it's an icon of the pastor). Obviously people will have to search and look in depth to find that image. The first person to find the image and email the eMinistry team gets a prize.

Similarly, you can put a weekly "eMinistry Quiz" online that requires people to search your site looking for answers found in the site content. Assuming that you have fresh content on your site, people will be motivated to check back weekly for each week's new game. When you realize how much time people spend on the Internet, this is well within reason.

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### Conclusion

It hasn't been that long ago since the telephone was considered a strange new technology. There are stories of churches who dug in their heels and resisted the telephone out of fear. Yet, many more churches were willing to venture out and use the telephone to enhance the existing face to face ministry of the church. Imagine operating a church today without a telephone, much less a cell phone!

Never forget that your Web site is just a tool of communication. For those of you who were born with a pen in your hand rather than a keyboard — relax! The good news is that with easy to use tools, like ACS Technologies' Extend Platform, building a Web site is easy. Once you've got your Web site, challenge yourself to find ways to incorporate all of the daily ministries of the church into your Web site. You'll be amazed at how much time and energy you can save.

Keep in mind that churches with successful eMinistries generally have a team of committed people rather than the one "Web person." Using many of the creative ideas in this document, cast a vision for new ways to use your Web site. You will most likely be surprised at how many people jump at the opportunity to be on an eMinistry team.

Do me a favor, if you've been inspired or have other creative ideas about eMinistry, take a second and drop me an email. Your suggestions and ideas will serve to encourage others. We learn from each other! [davies@blueskyministries.com](mailto:davies@blueskyministries.com)

Finally, never underestimate the eternal impact your eMinistry work can and will make. Always remember our ultimate purpose as Christians, regardless of our job description, is to serve Christ and draw others into a relationship with Him. So remember Paul's words to the Colossians, "Whatever you do (including eMinistry), work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..." Col. 3:23

His doctoral work focused specifically on using the tools of the Internet to enhance face-to-face relationships in the local church and in small groups. He and his wife, Holly, have a daughter and two sons. They live in their home town of Atlanta, Georgia.



## Origin of the Extend Platform

Some time ago we recognized that our church, school, and ministry clients needed an affordable way to harness the Web for communication, evangelism, fund raising, and more.

The result was the ACS Extend Platform, an intuitive suite of tools for developing, managing, publishing, and syndicating Web content.

Using our in-depth knowledge of organizations like yours, we created a solution that meets your immediate needs while providing growth pathways into the future.

The Extend Platform is a secure, reliable Web content management platform for churches, private schools, and other faith-based organizations. It includes powerful tools for managing content, increasing membership, services, revenues, and even building networks of affiliated sites. It includes several service levels to meet a variety of budgets and needs.

The Extend Platform allows anyone (even non-technical computer users) to build a professional-looking Web site—or a community of hundreds of affiliated sites—quickly and affordably. Customizable layout tools and templates allow you to develop Web pages and create, review, edit, approve, and post content.

## Extend's Powerful Web Tools

The Extend Platform enables you to build a professional looking, affordable site in hours - not weeks. Essentially, this means you can acquire the flexibility and functionality of a world-class site without a world-class investment in time or money.

We've been able to make the Extend Platform affordable by eliminating the need for special software, complex licensing agreements, and expensive hardware—and by placing the entire service on our own secure infrastructure.

Our standard content management tools are browser-based and secure. This means you can access them from anywhere the Internet reaches. Our standard features include:

- **Content Creator**
- **Content Manager**
- **Site Editor**
- **Publications Manager**
- **Workflow**
- **Media Manager.**
- **Administration Tools**
- **Reports**

“ACS has created a solution that meets your needs while providing growth pathways into the future.”

## Extend's World-Class Architecture

The ACS Extend Platform is built on industry standards including SQL, XML, and XSLT for content markup and display, and Java and the J2EE open standard for the underlying code. The system is scalable (that is, it can grow with your organization) and offers many ways to integrate new and legacy data. For example, it supports the SOAP interface standard. Use of open standards throughout the system ensures maximum flexibility and adaptability.

The platform uses IBM Websphere at the Application Server tier. The database tier operates on high end, high performance databases. Both Oracle and Microsoft SQL Server databases are supported.

The architecture supports text-based browsers, as well as most graphics-based browsers, PDA/Wireless devices, and Western European and other languages. ACS Technologies has endeavored to provide a universal platform for the distribution of your message to the world.



**F**or 25 years, ACS Technologies has developed outstanding software products and services for faith-based organizations.

By actively serving over 12,000 clients, we are able to develop a broad selection of solutions that work together to address the every day needs of faith-based organizations. We continually listen to our clients and make deliberate efforts to partner with them as we design new or improved solutions around their feedback. As a result, we can confidently offer a mixture of products and services that will increase operational efficiencies and reduce unwanted redundancies.

ACS Technologies has become an integral part of our clients' operations. Our company-wide commitment to excellence is one reason 7,000 clients have been with us for more than 5 years and a third of those for over 10 years. And because of our impact within the industry, we continue to receive notable recognition for outstanding dedication to our client relationships.

[www.acstechnologies.com](http://www.acstechnologies.com)

### To the Reader

It is our hope that reading "eMinistry Basics: Making Your Web Site a Daily Part of Church Life" has provided you with some critical insight into planning and prioritizing what you need online. Advancing your church, school or other faith-based organization with the right technology is paramount. There is much the Web can offer to benefit your organization in fulfillment of its mission. We encourage you to continue your pursuit of an effective Web strategy.

To learn more about ACS Technologies, the Extend Platform, and our approach to Web development, visit us online at [www.extendplatform.com](http://www.extendplatform.com), call us toll free at 1-800-736-7425, or email us at [extend@acstechnologies.com](mailto:extend@acstechnologies.com).

