Are You Ready for E-Ministry?

Through the modern technology of the WorldWide Web we can make available Christian apologetics to believers, seekers, and skeptics worldwide. Through the use of electronic mail (e–mail), we can offer personalized responses to questions raised by seekers, skeptics, and believers alike. Like the Roman Roads of the first century, today the Internet is a worldwide electronic computer communication network that the Church needs to utilize, sending bold, thoughtful, trained apologists worldwide, using this modern, God-given technology.

by Keith Seabourn

Recently I received the following email:

..Please help me. I recently began looking into the claims for Christianity and the Bible and was given Josh McDowell's Evidence That Demands A Verdict. I became convinced about the reality of the Christian faith only to have it shattered by [an atheistic] web site. Basically it tears the evidence for Jesus apart. What I am looking for is for you to show me how and why they are wrong. I understand that you may be busy but I am really in need on some proof that Jesus and the Bible are real. I am not a Christian yet and the [other website] article is a major obstacle to me making a commitment to Christ. Therefore please E-mail me with some answers or direct me to somewhere that has answers. Thank you, Martin.

The Internet is a 24 hour–a–day, 7 day–a–week operation with a worldwide scope. There is always somebody, someplace needing information your ministry materials can provide—seeking help personally or wanting resources to equip them to minister to others.

Martin's message above emphasizes two interesting phenomena that have become familiar as we at Christian Leadership Ministries (CLM) have developed a major Internet–based ministry. First, Martin puts more credibility on the atheistic Web site than he does on the printed book *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. The atheistic site to which Martin refers does a point–by–point refutation of McDowell's book. The atheistic site "shatters" Martin's faith. It is more powerful to him than McDowell's book.

Secondly, Martin's preferred medium for receiving help is the Internet. He asks for an e–mail response or to be directed to additional Internet materials to help answer his questions.

A growing number of people today, particularly young people, trust electronic media more than printed media. Electronic media is interactive. It is stimulating. It is current and fresh. Printed media is often associated with older ways of thinking. The Internet, and particularly that part called the World Wide Web (or WWW), is the fastest growing version of electronic media ever.

Our engagement in this battle transcends computers and networks, but we still utilize these tools God has given us. It behooves us to strategically employ the powerful media represented by computer communication technologies.

"1996 was the first year in which more money was spent in the USA on personal computers than on televisions. It was also the first year in which the total amount of e–mail exceeded the total amount of surface mail." (Global Monitor, January/February 1997)

Business is rapidly gravitating towards doing business on the Internet. This electronic business is called E–business or E–commerce (electronic business and electronic commerce). In the same way, electronic ministry (or E–ministry) holds tremendous potential.

Through the technology of the Worldwide Web, we can make available Christian apologetics to believers, seekers, and skeptics worldwide. Through the use of electronic mail (e–mail), we can offer personalized responses to questions raised by seekers, skeptics, and believers who visit the sites.

A Modern Roman Road

The early Church expanded and flourished in a hostile culture because she saw the importance of sending bold, thoughtful, trained *apologists* to take the gospel into new and varied cultures. The pathway that enabled the rapid expansion of the gospel was the Roman highway system. Today,

we have a new Roman Road—the worldwide electronic computer communication network known as the Internet. Today, the Church needs to return to sending bold, thoughtful, trained apologists worldwide, using the Internet communication system.

In the early days of Christianity, the Roman empire dominated the Mediterranean world. As they conquered, the Romans built an extensive highway system to better control the subjugated territories. Rome's philosophy was to convert conquered peoples into Romans, imposing their language and culture. The highway system allowed greater influence over conquered societies.

The Roman highways were called the Devil's Highway by some. It represented unwanted intrusion into their societies. Some Christians today feel that the Internet represents all that is bad in society: pornography, neo–Nazi hate groups, etc. Parents are afraid that their children will be exposed to all sorts of evil opportunities. Today, some would call the Internet "the devil's highway."

However, the Apostle Paul saw the Roman highway system as God's provision—a means to travel far and wide taking the gospel to the entire known world. At Christian Leadership Ministries, we believe that the Internet is God's latest gift of communication technology to His church—a means of mass communication that is far better than any previous means, that reaches all over the world in ways that no other does.

Ministry on the Internet

Our extensive experience on the Internet has taught us that …

The Internet is a unique communication medium. You use the same technology to broadcast your message and for personal counseling, interaction, and follow–up. The Internet marries both broadcast (one–to–many, like TV and radio) and individual (one–to–one, like telephone and letter) communications into a single medium. This has never before been possible.

The Internet is the least expensive means of communication. Compared to other modes of communication (print, TV, radio), the Internet is a much more cost effective medium.

You can reach people you wouldn't otherwise reach. Through the Internet, you can reach new people who might never hear your message any other way. Our statistics show that our Web sites are viewed by people all over the world, in countries many wouldn't even think had computers. The Internet is everywhere and gaining in popularity and acceptance every day.

People are looking for good materials on the Internet. We regularly receive comments from people who are grateful for our high–quality resources that they can trust. Like television, radio and the cinema, the Internet contains some offensive materials. Therefore, through a Web site, your quality resources will shine even brighter on the Internet.

You can reach people for Christ on the Internet. At CLM we've had tremendous success in outreach through electronic evangelism, or E–vangelism as Andrew Careaga called it in Charisma. We've received correspondence from people who have been dramatically affected by something they read on our sites or through e–mail interaction with one of our E–ministry volunteers.

The Internet is here to stay and is growing. The World Wide Web has great growth potential, both in its audience and innovative content. More and more people are investigating the information superhighway. Internet traffic is doubling every 100 days, resulting in an annual growth rate of more than 700 percent. (U.S. Commerce Department, quoted in Internet Computing, July, 1998.)

Websites

There are two basic types of Web sites: electronic brochures and tools for ministry.

Brochures talk about *us*, who *we* are, how you can join *us*, *our* telephone number, *our* recruiting policies, *our* books to sell, etc. There is a place for these *brochureware* or *billboard* sites, but they should not be the only type of Web sites Christians build.

E-ministries focusing on *tools for ministry* are often overlooked when Christian organizations develop a Web site. These sites are designed to minister to others. There are two divisions in this category. *E–quipping* sites mobilize, empower and equip Christians to engage in spiritual battle. *E–vangelism* sites model innovative, compelling, winsome, attractive ministry that targets non–Christians.

A balanced E-ministry designs and operates both E–quipping sites (discipling believers) and E–vangelism sites (interacting with non–believers).

Equipping with Apologetics

Discipleship sites provide ministry tools for equipping Christians. However, they should do much more than that. The early church grew phenomenally because of many factors. They understood how to be filled with God's Spirit to empower them for ministry. They had a deep understanding of God's Word. They sacrificially committed themselves to the task of world evangelization.

But there were two additional elements that they applied in their strategy to reach their world: (1) they *trained apologists* who could clearly

and articulately apply the principles of Scripture to current issues in society and (2) they *embraced the Roman highways* to spread their message.

In his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark Noll said, "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." Most Christians don't know how to think *Christianly*. C. S. Lewis stated. "He [Christ] wants a child's heart, but a grown–up's head." John Wesley reminds us, "Ought not a Minister to have, first, a good understanding, a clear apprehension, a sound judgment, and a capacity of reasoning with some closeness?"

Most evangelical Christians are woefully unprepared to obey 1 Peter 3:15, to be an apologist—to give an answer, to make a defense for their faith. We at CLM have had great success equipping Christians using Web sites that focus on *issues–based apologetics*. We seek to provide the best information in the world on a multitude of issues, informed by a biblical worldview.

The goal is "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith..." (Ephesians 4:12). *The goal is to equip and train apologists who are prepared to give answers to biblical faith and life.*

We also build evangelistic sites. In the present post–Christian era, our E–vangelism starts with an issue of interest to the individual. It proceeds through an exposure to a biblical perspective. It offers opportunity to enter a discussion about a Christian's attitude toward a specific issue. Then we offer an opportunity to receive Christ.

Evangelistic Web sites are most effective when: they follow an intentional approach; target a specific audience; offer tips and helps on specific issues; allow interested people to drill deeper and deeper into a site as they explore the issue; share personal stories (testimonies) of people who have found satisfaction and significance in life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; invite interested people to interact by e–mail. Above all, as the suitable opportunities arise, offer an opportunity to receive Christ.

> "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." Most Christians don't know how to think *Christianly*.

In addition to providing resources tailored for screen presentation via the World Wide Web (using the HTML language), we prepare every resource in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format. This allows a high–quality print version to be retrieved. We encourage users to take the print versions and give to friends and then discuss the issues with them. We also provide our resources in ASCII Text (TXT) format. This allows people around the world, who perhaps do not have WWW access, to still obtain resources via automated e–mail request.

A Success Story

Leadership University *(www.leaderu.com)* went online in September, 1995, with the goal of putting thousands of resources on the Web—resources that reflect a biblical worldview. To date we make available nearly 6,000 articles, reviews, essays, lectures, debates and other resources on the Internet. We have seen a steady increase in activity. In the last several months, we are seeing almost 300,000 visits every month (corresponding to nearly three million "hits") by Christians and non–Christians. We receive more than 500 e–mail messages every month requesting help, counsel, asking questions, occasionally objecting to material, etc. We've developed a nationwide network of people who want to be involved in E–ministry by responding to these e–mail messages.

[Insert Text Box 3 here.]

Other Websites

In addition to our main Leadership University site, we operate a number of other sites:

Origins (http://www.origins.org)—scholars on intelligent design of the universe and life.

Stonewall Revisited (http://www.stonewallrevisited.com) —help for homosexuals and those dealing with related questions.

Doug Yeo (http://www.yeodoug.com)—outreach from an accomplished professional musician.

World Religions Index (wri.leaderu.com)—comparative religions.

Christian Leadership Ministries (http://www.clm.org)—mobilizing university faculty for ministry on their campuses.

We have also launched a project called Telling the Truth (http://www.clm.org/ttt). Through this project, we also partner with a number of other organizations and individuals who see the tremendous potential to affect the way people think by using the modern Roman road called the Internet.

Fulfill Your Vision

E–ministry can help reach the Martin's of the world—those who look to the Internet to examine answers to

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their life's questions. Is your ministry prepared to help Martin using the communication medium he prefers? Are you using the modern–day Roman road to travel the world and minister in diverse locations?

E–Ministry is electronic ministry via the Internet that provides a 24 hour–a–day, 7 day–a–week presence anywhere in the world. E-Ministry has tremendous benefits in allowing you to affect the way people think and live.

Photo here
of
Seabourn

Keith Seabourn is a member of the staff of Christian Leadership Ministries, the faculty ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. He directs Internet and web development for CLM. Keith and his wife, Kay, lived in Nigeria,   West Africa with their 3 children for 15 years where he taught in government colleges and directed the JESUS Film ministry, recording and producing the JESUS Film in numerous languages and directing film team strategies. He is the author of "Understanding Amateur Radio in the Federal Republic of Nigeria" and "Telling the Truth: A How-To Guide."

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