

# **High-Tech Worship**

*Digital Display Technologies and Protestant  
Liturgical Practice in the U.S.*

by

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to explore the adoption of media ministry by American Mainline Protestant churches. Media ministry, the incorporation of digital display technologies (DDT) into worship practice, began in Evangelical churches in the US. This study is based on fieldwork at two primary sites: Ginghamburg Church (Tipp City, OH), an Evangelical pioneer in media ministry and Christ Church (Troy, NY), a Mainline innovator. In addition, fieldwork was conducted at ten other churches, a parachurch organization, Promise Keepers, and several businesses that produce DDT media content for churches. I show how Mainline churches have adopted DDTs from Evangelical churches as a “technological fix” to solve the problem of declining membership. Because of differences in liturgical practice and understanding, however, Mainline churches produced text-rich slides, which while in keeping with their liturgical practice, do not work successfully to attract young people. Alternatively sometimes they purchase prefabricated visuals, but then they are faced with the often unrecognized problem that the content may undermine or run counter to their ideology. In my own church, I introduced an innovative “socio-technological fix” with the goal of 1) producing exciting new appealing forms of worship that would help retain, and ideally grow, Mainline congregations and 2) would be in keeping with the theological and ideological beliefs of our church. To that end I engaged laity in a worship production process that moved them from consumers to co-producers. While not perfect, the experiment may serve as a model for other Mainline churches on how to avoid the pitfalls of technological somnambulism. Artifacts do have politics and it is important for those considering adopting new technologies into their worship to be cognizant of the implications. In terms of STS, the case of media ministry provides a novel case for how artifacts have politics and the benefits of participatory design which mitigate the unintended consequences of the technological fix.

## Introduction

My journey into the world of “media ministry” began in November 1998 when I was studying for my Doctor of Ministry at Drew University. The dean of the Theological School was Len Sweet, a charismatic figure in the church who has challenged many within the United Methodist denomination to find new ways of communicating our message in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He personally encouraged me to integrate my undergraduate education in Computer Science with my vocational training as a parish pastor. In Len Sweet I found someone who not only valued my computer skills, but understood them to be vital for ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Len encouraged me to be part of his new Global Online Doctor of Ministry program using internet-based training tools to enhance the traditional face-to-face pedagogical methods. I enrolled in the program and found myself traveling to West Virginia for one of Len’s “Advances:” – he refuses to call his gatherings “retreats.” There were approximately twenty people gathered for this event, most enrolled in the same doctoral program I was.

The key speaker at this gathering was Michael Slaughter, the lead pastor of Ginghamburg United Methodist Church in Tipp City, Ohio. Slaughter had become widely known for the rapid growth of his church from fewer than 100 attending to thousands within a few years. Even more impressive were the demographics of his growing church, mostly young adults, the ever-elusive and often sought after demographic of the church. How did he manage to get these young adults to come to church? His secret, he claimed, had to do with something called media ministry.

Although I had been a pastor since 1991, media ministry was a term I had not heard before. It was new nomenclature for a phenomenon that has since spread rapidly throughout the Christian church. Len Sweet often refers to this time of change as a new Reformation fueled by the technology of the digital projector (Sweet 1999; Sweet 1999; Sweet 2000). Like the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, sparked by the printing press, this reformation is primarily about communication and literacy. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the need was for the sacred Christian text of the Bible to be in the vernacular. This, combined with the mass production of Bibles through the printing press, allowed for a democratization of the church. Martin Luther called it the “priesthood of all believers.”

Michael Slaughter was undertaking a new reformation by integrating an enormous screen in the center of his worship space. The screen was used for both the projection of the live service and other graphic and video sources that enhanced the worship experience.

I left West Virginia energized and invigorated. I had seen what I believed to be the answer to the problem of providing relevant worship to younger generations. I knew that I had the skills needed to develop this same kind of worship. My challenge would be to integrate it into my congregation, Christ Church UMC (Troy, NY). Christ Church is an urban congregation serving downtown Troy, a declining post-industrial city in upstate New York. The congregation is predominately older and mixed socio-economically with very little racial/ethnic diversity. My wife who attended the conference with me was equally excited about the prospects. During the long drive home we mapped out a plan to demonstrate this to the congregation. We invested in a projector (no small investment in 1998) and planned four “experimental” worship services in January 1999. The label experimental was intentional. We wanted the congregation to understand that this was an experiment, to see what worship could be like, not what worship would be like from now on. We designed four very different services using various components we had learned from Slaughter at the Advance. After these services, we set up a process to collect data through focus groups which we called Worship Coffees. The Assistant Pastor, Janet Douglass, and I attended a dozen small gatherings in people’s homes designed as informal conversations about worship and the services they had just experienced. From this process we planned to return to the Church Council (the governing board of the church) with a recommendation as to what worship changes to make to the congregation.

I assumed from the beginning that the outcome would be a blend of this new style of worship and our traditional worship. To my surprise I discovered a small, but vocal population that wanted something new, radically new, and another population that wanted to keep the traditional worship, with the majority of individuals willing to do either. In the end the only solution to mitigate losses was to have two very different services. We added a Sunday evening worship service called Soul Café (named after the place we gathered in West Virginia with Len Sweet). For six years my wife and I and

the Assistant Pastor, Janet, ran this media-intensive worship service that included movie clips, graphics, and local musicians, all in a coffeehouse setting. We developed expertise in the technology and theory behind what we were doing.

While running these services I came to the conclusion of my Doctor of Ministry. My final project was to evaluate how the congregation's identity was affected by this and several technology-based ministries that had been added since I arrived at the church in 1997.<sup>1</sup> As I wrote my thesis it became clear to me that although my data, which included surveys and focus groups, indicated there was no change in identity, something was different. In one of my focus groups I asked a question about technology in the church and if it had any effect on individuals. One response haunted me. A 70 year-old woman said, "We're used to this technology. Its part of our everyday lives." I realized that I was not able to understand the changes within this church without first understanding the changes we as a society have undergone by adopting the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It was like trying to view an ant with a telescope. My methods and questions were too narrow.

I knew that I would not find the resources I needed in the Doctor of Ministry program so I completed the program knowing that I was going to continue this work elsewhere. After a search that took me in many directions, I discovered my academic home only a mile away in the Science and Technology Studies department at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

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<sup>1</sup> These technology-based ministries included: a telephone-based visitation program, a website ministry, online Bible studies, and computer lab for the church school.

## **Some Unintended Consequences of the Adoption of Media Ministry by Mainline Churches**

Media Ministry and the use of digital display technologies (DDTs) in worship began in the Evangelical Protestant churches in the US in the mid-1900s. They first adopted the technology for IMAG (Image Magnification), a technique which projects an enlarged visual image of the speaker. This technique contributes to the celebrity status of the preachers and parallels successes and visual techniques of the teleministries popular among Evangelicals during this same period. Innovative Evangelical churches like Ginghamburg and Evangelical parachurch organizations like Promise Keepers combined IMAG technology with computer generated graphics and videos in the mid-1990s. This combination of techniques is what has come to be known as media ministry. Their adoption of these technologies has been enormously successful. Their numbers have grown dramatically and the churches often credit these technological innovations for this success.

The Mainline Protestant churches in the US have desperately sought a way to fix their membership decline that began in the 1960s. The Mainline decline is attributed to both a societal decline in worship attendance (Putnam 2000) and a shift of adherents from Mainline churches to Evangelical churches. Beginning in the late 1990s Mainline churches began adopting media ministry as a technological fix (Weinberg 1997/1966) to their membership decline. By 2005 more than half the Mainline churches had adopted DDTs in some form. The Mainline churches historically rooted in the Protestant Reformation and the technology that fueled that revolution, the printing press, are heavily book/word oriented. This is evident in their use of hymnals, prayer books and worship bulletins (a printed order of worship). It is also reflected in their use of unison prayers, litanies (responsive readings), and song lyrics that dominate the order of worship. Most of the Mainline churches that adopted digital display technologies used them to continue their text-rich worship. This has led them to use the digital display technologies to “project their bulletins” onto sanctuary walls. This has not solved the problem of membership decline.

By the early 2000s some Mainline churches discovered companies that produced media for use in worship services. These companies which were founded by men who had worked as media ministers in Evangelical churches, produced graphics and videos that were of professional quality. The purchase and use of this media by Mainline churches led to unintended consequences (Tenner 1996), as the theological and ideological content of the media was incongruent with the Mainline churches' theology and ideology. In other words, not only did this not solve the membership problem but it created new problems.

## **Research Questions**

The question guiding this study is: *Can the technological fix of media ministry work for Mainline Protestant churches to solve membership decline?* Additional questions arise when exploring this central question. *Do the technologies of media ministry have politics? What are the unintended consequences of adoption of new technologies for worship? How can technology be integrated in Mainline worship in a way that enhances the theology and ideology of these churches?*

## **The Argument**

Mainline churches have adopted the use of digital display technologies from the Evangelical churches as a technological fix to solve the problem of declining membership. The fix has failed to attract members and has brought some undesirable unintended consequences. The adoption of this visual medium did not change the practice of constructing worship, resulting in text-rich slides projected onto a screen which are aesthetically unappealing. In addition, some Mainline churches purchased graphics and videos from Evangelical businesses resulting in incongruent theological and ideological messages. I propose a socio-technological fix that moves laity from consumers to co-producers using the model of Christ Church and which will produce visually interesting, theologically-appropriate media.

At Christ Church I piloted a socio-technological fix for Mainline churches. The result is a new way of connecting the metaphoric interpretation of the Bible common to this denomination with a metaphoric use of digital display technologies. In addition to

the innovation in content and form of the media materials produced for worship, this socio-technological fix introduces a Participatory Worship Design process that incorporates laity into the design of the service and production of media used within the service, moving laity from consumers to co-producers and diminishing hierarchy. Thus the design process is also harmonious with the theological and ideological thrust of the church. This move in church structure and process is parallel and complimentary to initiatives stemming out of and studied by Science and Technology Studies such as participatory design initiatives and the deployment of strong democracy in technological innovation.

## **Methods**

Although I became involved in media ministry in 1998, it wasn't until 2002 that I began to see myself not only as a practitioner of media ministry, but as a researcher of it. As I transitioned into the dual role of practitioner and researcher, I remember a distinct moment when my hermeneutical framework shifted. It was as if I had been given a new set of glasses with which to explore the world. The theoretical framework of Science and Technology Studies was that new set of lenses for me. What started as uneasiness with certain aspects of media ministry suddenly became the focus of my research into the phenomenon.

There were no fears of me “going native” during my research, because I was already native, being a Protestant Christian pastor. But even though I come from the same Christian tradition as most of the churches, organizations and businesses I studied, I do not share their theological and ideological perspectives. I understand the language, customs, and practices of those I studied, but for the most part they are not my own. I am a “progressive Christian,” ideologically liberal and socially progressive. I understand the Bible to be historically and culturally situated and therefore follow metaphoric interpretations of the Bible. This is considered, in theological terms, liberal. Those who interpret the Bible literally and seek to conserve the traditional interpretations and practices are considered theologically conservative.

I had two primary research sites. The first is Ginghamburg Church located in Tipp City, Ohio, is a pioneer of media ministry. During May of 2004 I lived and worked

at Ginghamburg Church where I was given unprecedented access to the staff, congregation and worship planning meetings. I observed the process of the construction of media and conducted focused interviews with sixteen of staff and lay members of the congregation. In addition to the current staff I also interviewed staff who had left Ginghamburg several years previously.

The second primary site is Christ Church in Troy, New York. I served this congregation as the Senior Pastor from 1997 to 2006 and guided the church through a major change in the worship style, integrating digital display technologies into the service. These changes and the congregational response are part of the research data collected as a participant observer. A composite description of a Mainline church is constructed from my experience as a Mainline pastor and District Superintendent with oversight for 70 churches and more than 60 pastors. The PowerPoint slides included in that were used by one of those churches for a worship service. The experiences and conflicts outlined in the chapter represent actual stories I heard from pastors during trainings I co-led in 2005-06.

In addition to these primary sites, ten additional Evangelical churches that use media in some form in the worship services were studied through participant observation of the worship services and informal conversations with staff and attendees of the services. I studied many other churches, organizations and businesses to portray the diversity that exists within the media ministry movement.

The Promise Keepers, an Evangelical men's revival ministry, has been a major influence in the development of media ministry. A chapter of this study is devoted to this organization and how it uses media. The Promise Keepers held approximately 12 large gatherings throughout the country in 2003-04. I attended two of these gatherings in 2003 and 2004 in Albany, New York. As a pastor of a local congregation I was invited to the planning sessions of the 2003 event and I attended these meetings to observe the process for hosting this particular event. During the event I was given a guided tour of the media production facilities and watched the event from "behind-the-scenes." I also interviewed the president of Fresh Air Media, the media production company in charge of developing the multimedia components of the program. In Chapter 3 a symbolic analysis is conducted of the opening of a Promise Keepers event.

There are several other businesses connected to the rise in media ministry. Nineteen focused interviews of those involved in this industry were conducted.

In addition to the participant-observations and focused interviews, two other methodologies were employed for this study. A content analysis of prefabricated media content and a magazine devoted to promoting and educating individuals about media ministry were conducted to investigate gender as one potential ideological incongruity between Evangelicals and Mainliners.

## **Key Literatures**

In order to explore the factors influencing the rise and proliferation of media ministry, this study draws upon several literatures including: participatory design, deliberative democracy, the politics of artifacts, and the intersections of religion, media studies and technology.

Throughout this study gender is explored as a vector for hierarchy in religious and technological systems. The goal of an egalitarian design process requires the elimination, or at least the mitigation of gender hierarchy. To explore these issues we need the resources of gender study literatures devoted to both religion and technology.

### ***Participatory Design and Deliberative Democracy***

Participatory design and deliberative democracy have the common goal of incorporating wider participation of individuals in the decision-making process. In participatory design, non-experts are included in the design process to insure that local knowledge of stakeholders is incorporated into the final product. In deliberative democracy local knowledge is incorporated into decision making by intentionally involving a wide representation of stakeholders in the policy making process. Both participatory design and deliberative democracy are foundational to developing an egalitarian design process.

Charles Lindblom and Edward Woodhouse (1993) seek the inclusion of “ordinary citizens” in the policy-making process. Although far from an egalitarian process of governance, Lindblom and Woodhouse offer steps to diversify the political imagination from the current political elites.

Benjamin Barber (1984) refers to “strong democracy” as an organizational principle for society that incorporates egalitarian and participatory processes. He and others have cited New England town meetings, the civil rights movement, and the Polish solidarity movement as examples of strong democracy (Rawls 1971; Mansbridge 1980; Barber 1984; Bowles and Gintis 1986; Gould 1988).

The democratization of technological design is especially important for this study. Richard Sclove (1995) writes, “If citizens ought to be empowered to participate in determining their society’s basic structure, and technologies are an important species of social structure, it follows that technological design and practice should be democratized.” This democratization of technological design seeks the inclusion of non-expert stakeholders into the design process.

This inclusion of stakeholders requires an intentional process of intervention. Current scholarship in the field rarely offers this form of activism. Recent criticism of social constructivism’s reliance on description rather than prescription and intervention underscores the need for additional studies of participatory design and deliberative democracy in action (Winner and Society for Philosophy and Technology (U.S.) 1992; Martin 1996; Hamlett 2003).

### ***Religion and Technology***

There is a wide body of literature regarding science and religion which addresses the controversy as to whether or not the scientific paradigm is compatible with literalist Christian paradigms of creation. There is much less work on religion and technology. Ethicist Ian Barbour (1960; 1966; 1968; 1970; 1974; 1980; 1990; 1993; 1997; 2000; 2002) who primarily has written on the relationship between science and religion, has one text devoted to technology, *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (1993). Another work in this area is J. Stephen Lansing’s *Priest and Programmers* (1991) describes the integration within the religious practice of water distribution in the Bali engineered landscape. Linda Layne (1990; 1992; 1996; 1997; 1999; 1999; 2000; 2000; 2003) examines how the biomedical technology and religion are woven together in narratives of pregnancy loss.

The most significant contribution to the discussion of Religion and Technology comes from William Stahl (1999; 2002) whose texts connect the literature and methods of STS with the both the science and religion debate and the study of religion and technology. Stahl, a sociologist, suggests that social science needs to regain a prominent role in the discussion of both science and religion and science and technology. Theologians and scientists dominate the publications of these discussions that once were considered the domain of the sociology of religion.

### *Media Studies*

The origins of contemporary media studies can be traced to the 1930s and the German Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School. It's primary figures included: Max Horkheimer (Horkheimer 1947; Horkheimer 1972; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Horkheimer 1974), Theodor W. Adorno (Adorno 1973; Adorno 1976; Adorno, Adorno et al. 1984; Adorno and Bernstein 1991), Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse 1941; Marcuse 1964; Marcuse 1968; Marcuse 1969; Marcuse 1972; Marcuse 1978), and Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 1968; Benjamin 2006/1935). The Frankfurt School analyzed mass communication forms from a Marxist structural approach, focusing on the production, reproduction and distribution of media.

Walter Benjamin's work is the most important for this study. His often cited critique on the mechanical reproduction of art forms entitled, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" argues that the "aura" that comes from an original work of art or performance is lost when that work is reproduced.

The next major influence came from the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies known as the Birmingham School. The Birmingham School was heavily influenced by British cultural studies and included Richard Hoggart (Hoggart 1957; Hoggart 1969; Hoggart 1972; Hoggart 1972; Hoggart and Morgan 1982; Hoggart 2004), Stuart Hall (Hall and Whannel 1964; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hall 1980; Hall 1995; Hall and Du Gay 1996) and Raymond Williams (Williams 1958; Williams 1962; Williams 1974; Williams 1976; Williams 1982; Williams 2006/1980). The work of the Birmingham School and British cultural studies in general, provided

analyses of gender, race and sexuality. This greatly extended the critique which to this time had focused upon issues of class and structural critiques of capitalism.

New technologies like the Internet have given rise to postmodern critiques of media. Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, McPherson et al. 2002; Jenkins, Thorburn et al. 2003; Jenkins 2006; Jenkins 2006) critiques the clash between new and old media. His research explores the participatory culture of new media where the distinctions between producer and consumer converge. Finally, Chris Rojek (Rojek 2001) explores the rise of the celebrity and celebrity culture within postmodern culture; this informs our analysis of the Evangelical megachurch pastor.

### ***Religion and Media Studies***

There are three main strands in the literature on religion and media that were relevant to this work. First is the study of Christian material culture, the study of the “things” produced in the Christian culture, exemplified by the work of David Morgan (Morgan 1996; Morgan 1999; Morgan and Promey 2001; Morgan 2008) and Colleen McDannell (McDannell 1986; McDannell and Lang 1990; McDannell 1995; McDannell 1996; McDannell 2001; McDannell 2004). Morgan has traced the use of religious imagery throughout Christianity. His work specifically focuses on American Protestantism’s use of visual imagery for devotional and educational purposes. His best known work is a study of *The Head of Christ* by Warner Sallman. McDannell has produced the definitive studies on the objects (including images) that are created and consumed by Christians.

The second significant literature source is the study of televangelism. Quentin Schultze’s *Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion* (1991) argues that televangelism turns Jesus into a consumer product sold on television. Susan Harding’s study of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority explores the power of the medium of television to construct not only a religious leader but a political organization (Harding 2000). David Harrell provides a study on the innovative media use by Oral Roberts to attain a significant influence (Harrell 1993). Tamar Gordon provides insights on the visual cultures of Pentecostalism (Gordon 2005; Gordon and Hancock 2005).

The third source of literature comes from Stewart Hoover (Hoover 1988; Hoover and Lundby 1997; Hoover 1998; Hoover and Clark 2002; Hoover, Clark et al. 2004) the director of the Center for Media, Religion and Culture at the University of Colorado's Center for Mass Media Research. His work and that of the Center has a broad agenda that includes mass communication and religion, popular culture's influence on religion, and the construction of meaning and identity through media practice.

### ***Media Studies and STS***

In their chapter in the recent edition of *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, Pablo Boczkowski and Leah Lievrouw (2008) provide an overview of the study of media and information technologies by two differing disciplines — Media studies and science and technology studies (STS). STS often explores the construction or production of media technologies with little or no work on how these are consumed. Conversely, media studies often focuses on the consumption of the media with only cursory explorations of the production dynamics.

This study is aimed to bridge the gap between these two epistemological spheres. The production of the media in the churches and media ministry businesses is a significant undertaking of this project. The cultural, historical and religious context of these production settings is explored. Equally significant is the examination of the consumption of digital media. The digital media studied is intended to be used in Christian worship settings. This digital media is constructed to communicate a persuasive message to those who receive it. There is nothing neutral about the message of this media. This study of the production and consumption of religious media seeks to bring change to a growing industry of media construction, change that will ultimately lead to a more egalitarian construction process.

### ***Gender and Religion***

Within the extensive literature of gender and religion two related subsets are important for this project: Gender in Evangelical Christianity, and the construction of masculinity through the Promise Keepers.

Important work on gender in Evangelical Christianity comes from sociologist Sally K. Gallagher (1999; 2003; 2004; 2004; 2005). Her studies have focused on developing a complex understanding of the gendered role of Evangelical Christian women. She identifies the tension that exists in contemporary Evangelical families between the acceptance of modern values of equal work and equal status for women and the Biblical and church mandate for men to continue as the head of a family (Gallagher 2003).

Her research on “antifeminist” rhetoric in the Evangelical church revealed that a vast majority of Evangelical women ascribe to values and practices that would in many circumstances be classified “feminist” (Gallagher 2004). Her research underscores both the divergent views of Evangelicals and the strength of the Evangelical church to produce a unified rhetoric.

Gallagher is not the only scholar producing work on women and Evangelical Christianity. Others (Harding 1991; Hawley 1994; Griffith 1997; Beaman 1999; Ruether 2002) have provided valuable research in this field.

The Promise Keepers, an Evangelical Christian parachurch organization, has contributed to the recent development of masculinity among Evangelical in response to second-wave feminism. The organization attempts to resolve the tension between the growing acceptance of women’s equality with the Biblical mandate for men to be the heads of their families.

Gallagher argues that the Promise Keepers’ influence in Evangelical Christianity has become insignificant and that a 2001 text by John Eldredge entitled *Wild at Heart* now dominates the construction of masculinity (Gallagher and Wood 2005). Eldredge’s text returns men to the mythopoetic movement begun by Robert Bly (1990).

The Promise Keepers’ influence may have diminished, but the influence of its construction of masculinity among Evangelical’s persists. There have been numerous studies on this Evangelical men’s movement (Abraham 1997; Arms 1997; Kimmel 1997; Lippy 1997; Kennedy 1998; Ribuffo 1998; Brickner 1999; Burstyn 1999; Silverstein, Auerbach et al. 1999; Allen 2000; Bartkowski 2000; Bloch 2000; Chrasta 2000; Claussen 2000; Claussen 2000; Johnson 2000; Lockhart 2000; Quicke and

Robinson 2000; Williams 2000; Williams 2001; Heath 2003; Gallagher and Wood 2005).

### ***Gender and Technology***

Marginalization of people on grounds of gender is a frequently studied form of politics in technology studies.. As Cassel and Jenkins argue in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*:

We noticed that the women in our office seemed to respond quite differently to the sight of boxes of high-tech equipment arriving in the office than most of our male colleagues. The men seemed magnetically drawn to the boxes, tearing them open, practically salivating at the sight of the shiny, new machines emerging from their Styrofoam nest. Then there would be the sound of happily boastful speculation about their speed, the power, the number of bips per bump the machine could produce or consume, and how it compared to a range of other machines with whose model numbers everybody seemed intimately familiar. We women tended to stay back and watch this frenzy with some amusement and a strong dose of skepticism, best summarized in the polite request that they let us know when they had put the thing together and had figured out what it was good for. We knew that there was no difference in technical expertise to explain this difference in attitude. Several of the women were more technically sophisticated than some of the men who were spitting stats at the new machine, and these women would probably end up setting up the machine, figuring out how to make good use of it – and then explaining it to the men (Cassell and Jenkins 1998).

This description of this twentieth century American office setting is the stereotypical understanding of “boys’ toys.” What is highlighted is not a difference in technical knowledge, but a difference in attitude or response to the technology. It is not that “high-tech” is the realm of men only, where only men have the ability to manipulate and control it, rather this passage illustrates the value ascribed to technology by women and men. Why do American men ascribe a greater value to “high-tech?”

Gender differentiation is at the heart of gender identification of objects including technology. How we differentiate people has a great deal to do with how we differentiate things. Nelly Oudshoorn (1994) has provided a fascinating exploration into the construction of gender through the identification of sex hormones. The “discovery” of sex hormones and their function has shifted gender classification. “Instead of

identifying which organ was considered as the seat of femininity and masculinity, sex endocrinologists looked for the causal mechanism which regulates the development of the organism into a male or a female.” (Oudshoorn 1994) This causal relationship became more complex after it was discovered that humans have both male and female hormones in every body and that gender is “created” by the proportion of these two hormones. This shift has led to the adoption of a theory of gender as a continuum as opposed to a simple binary of male or female. “[A]n individual could be classified in many categories varying from ‘virile to effeminate male’ or from ‘a masculine to a feminine female.’” (Oudshoorn 1994)

Oudshoorn’s work demonstrates the social construction of gender. Gender has multiple physiological and psychological “markers” that indicate male or female, but in the end it is society that makes the final distinction. Therefore, it is not that gender does not exist, but that gender is a construct given validity through science. This does not mean there is no “real” distinction between men and women, or in Donna Harway’s words, “to be ‘made’ is not to be ‘made up.’ (Haraway 1997) There are differences between men and women, but many of these differences, including the attitudes toward technology, are socially constructed.

One way to illustrate this point is to explore overt instances of ascribing gender to things. Ulf Mellstrom (2002; 2003) uses his research with Malaysian motor mechanics to explore the anthropomorphism of technology in the form of vehicles. For the Malaysian motor mechanics, vehicles are seen as feminine and knowledge of vehicle repair is a highly prized realm of masculinity. Mellstrom concludes that the anthropomorphism of technology is a highly contextualized phenomenon where “different masculinities relate differently to different technologies.” (Mellstrom 2003) What is clear from this research is the element of power involved. Male mechanics seek to gain knowledge and skill in manipulating vehicles that they have ascribed as female. This relationship maps perfectly on Malaysia’s patriarchal society. This mirroring effect of social ideology within everyday practice is part of the social construction of gender.

In a capitalistic society, value is equated with capital. In the capitalistic marketplace jobs and the salary for those jobs define the value of an individual. In an article entitled “The Material of Male Power” (1999) Cynthia Cockburn focuses on the

dynamics between both capitalism and patriarchy. Coining the term “andrarchy” she notes that there is more than just patriarchy working against women in the workplace. The capitalistic system also has an interest in exploiting women as well. She writes:

The class relations are those of capitalism. The gender relations are those of a wider, more pervasive and more long-lived male dominance system than patriarchy. They are those of a sex-gender system in which men dominate women outside family relations, inside and outside family relations, inside and outside economic production, by means which are both material and ideological, exercising their authority through both individual and organizational development. It is more nearly andrarchy than patriarchy (Cockburn 1999).

Patriarchy in the workplace, or “andrarchy” as Cockburn describes it, is a phenomenon that needs more attention and future research. She ends with questions about the future of the interplay of capitalism and patriarchy. Cockburn wonders, “Will [men] eventually abandon de-skilled manual work to women, recreating the job segregation that serves male dominance.” (Cockburn 1999)

Historically women have been relegated to menial jobs that are often less prestigious and lower paying. Cockburn & Susan Ormrod in their major ethnographic work on the production and consumption of the microwave, *Gender & Technology in the Making* (Cockburn and Ormrod 1993), provide a comprehensive study on gender and technology. Cockburn and Ormrod studied the entire production and consumption of the microwave, from design to construction to sales and finally to use. Their findings are not surprising. Men dominated the engineering positions and women dominated the low paying production line jobs. Men dominated the sales positions and women dominated the purchasing role of the microwave. The cohesiveness of this stereotypical gender role pattern comes from authority.

Perhaps the most important practical difference between women and men in this actor-world is simply the degree of authority they wield. Technological know-how gives authority over materials, artifacts and work processes. Managerial position gives authority over people and organization. Men are, not always but in a great majority of the cases, the experts, the ones who know, those who are responsible, the bosses. Where women have an expertise and a responsibility it is often in a sphere that is itself given

less value than the sphere a man controls. It is the authoritative position that ascribes value and in a patriarchal society men ascribe that value.

A study by Jennifer Light on the beginnings of the professionalization of computer programmers illustrates how value can be shifted. “When Computers were Women” (1999) is an account of the use of women with mathematical skills as “human computers” to make repetitive ballistic computations, and describes the replacement of women by the early computers. The women were the initial “programmers” of the computers. Their replacement came as the value of their tasks was increased. The ENIAC project made a fundamental distinction between hardware and software: designing hardware was a man’s job; programming was a woman’s job. Each of these gendered aspects of the project had its own clear status classification. Software, a secondary, clerical task, did not match the importance of constructing the ENIAC and getting it to work. The occupation of “human computer” was a repetitive low-status job; the newly formed computer programmer occupation became a higher status job, and that is when men took over the field.

This example illustrates how the value of a job (or for that matter a thing) is a socially negotiated process rather than an intrinsic entity. When we combine this example with the work of Cockburn & Ormrod we see that authority is a key determining factor for the valuation of a job. It is also an example of the “Matilda effect” (Rossiter 1993) that states that those with low status, like the early women programmers, will not only continue in low status but will finally be virtually excluded from the historical memory.

Our built environment is encoded with many forms of politics including the reification of sexism. Francesca Bray (1997) in her detailed study of domestic life in Late Imperial China found that not only were gender roles encoded in domestic architecture, but also that much of the Chinese belief system, including its cosmology, was built into the home. She states, “technology is a form of cultural expression, and as such plays a key role in the creation and transmission of ideology.”

J. Stephen Lansing (1991) describes the complex integration of cosmology in the construction of water temples in Bali that serve as the irrigation system for the entire island. Likewise, Wajcman uncovers ideology in what she calls the “built environment.”

(Wajcman 1991) Our environment, designed and constructed (primarily) by men, is a reflection and possibly a reification of the ideology of our society.

The “built environment” is not the product of some male-devised conspiracy, but are subconscious responses of male designers making technical choices. Langdon Winner articulates this position very well:

Consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or inadvertently, societies choose structures for technologies that influence how people are going to work, communicate, travel, consume, and so forth over a very long time. In the processes by which structuring decisions are made, different people situated differently and possess unequal degrees of power as well as unequal levels of awareness...choices tend to become strongly fixed in material equipment, economic investment, and social habit (Winner 1986).

We are surrounded by an environment that is deeply encoded with our society’s corporate ideology. For better or for worse, this ideology is reinforced and reproduced unwittingly by those who design and produce our “built environment.”

This dissertation will explore the role of women and men in the production and consumption of media ministry, building on the work of those cited above. It will also explore how media ministry produces a virtual “built environment” which is both shaped by and shaping gender.

## **The Chapters**

Chapter One, “The Historical and Religious Context of Media Ministry,” begins with the Protestant Reformation and highlights the significant historical and religious events leading to the development of media ministry.

The next two chapters are ethnographies of successful Evangelical groups that pioneered media ministry. Chapter Two, “Ginghamsburg: An Evangelical Pioneer,” is an ethnography of Ginghamsburg Church, the church often credited as the first to use this visual technology in worship. This chapter describes the process of the development of worship services using a Worship Design Team. This team design model is spread to other churches through books and workshops produced by the staff of the church. Their desire for an open, creative process is thwarted by the power dynamics of team/church/theology which preclude a democratic constructive process.

Chapter Three, “The Promise Keepers: Purveyor of Evangelical Media Ministry,” explores the propagation of worship style and technological advances in media ministry by a parachurch Evangelical Christian men’s movement. This chapter describes the history of a pioneering group in the field of media ministry. The Promise Keepers is a men’s renewal movement that calls faithful men to return to their rightful position as leaders in their families. Through technology and the media created by technology, this group is able to reinforce its ideological perspectives in gatherings, and throughout Evangelical Christianity.

Chapter Four, “First Church: A Mainline Church using Digital Display Technologies,” provides a composite ethnography of a Mainline church’s use of digital display technology. It describes the worship planning process and the adoption of the technology as a response to declining membership.

Chapter Five, “The Unintended Consequences of the Technological Fix” outlines the problems faced by Mainline churches in adopting digital display technologies. The use of the technology as a technological fix for the problem of declining membership is highly problematic. Mainline churches adopting the media content produced by Evangelical businesses soon find there are unintended consequences with the theology and politics of the artifacts adopted. This chapter also uses content analysis of a popular magazine, *Technologies for Worship Magazine*, to explore the role of women in media ministry.

Chapter Six, “Christ Church: An Experiment in Participatory Worship Design” is an ethnography documenting Christ Church, a church served by the researcher. The ethnography is an attempt to develop a worship planning process that seeks to mitigate the “politics of the artifacts.” It provides a socio-technological solution to the problems of adopting digital display technologies for worship.

The Conclusion seeks to answer the central question of this investigation: Can digital display technologies solve the problem of decline in Mainline churches?

# Chapter 1

## *The Historical and Religious Context of Media Ministry*

Media ministry may have originated when video projector technology became affordable in the late 1990s but there were significant cultural and religious changes that truly gave birth to this combination of information technology and Christian worship. This chapter provides a brief overview of the span between the Protestant Reformation to the current rise of Evangelical Christianity. It traces significant events in the life of Protestant Christianity that have shaped media ministry.

### **The Protestant Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

Media ministry is a Protestant phenomenon. Although there are some Roman Catholic churches using video technology in worship, I have not encountered a Roman Catholic Church that uses visual media as an integral part of its worship services. St. Peter's Cathedral in New York uses television sets to project live video for those whose view is either obstructed by pillars or to compensate for the significant distance between the seats and the altar area.

The Protestant Reformation is commonly referenced as beginning in 1517 with the German Roman Catholic priest Martin Luther nailing his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg (Chadwick 1964). However, the roots of the reformation began many years earlier as corruption plagued the church, especially within the hierarchy. Discontent spread throughout many parts of present-day Western Europe, primarily Germany, Switzerland, and England. Both clergy and laity focused their discontent upon the power structures of the church (Latourette 1953; Chadwick 1964; Matheson 2007).

Several foundational principles of the Protestant Reformation and one specific technology are important precursors to media ministry. Each of these plays a particular role in media ministry and its context today.

### ***Sola Scriptura***

A Latin phrase meaning “by Scripture alone,” this is a foundational theological concept for the Protestant Reformation. It asserts that theological doctrine must be

rooted in Scripture alone. This contrasts the Roman Catholic understanding that Scripture is important but not the sole authority on doctrine. Tradition is another important authoritative source for the Roman Catholic Church as well as the teachings of the Pope. The Reformers believed tradition and papal authority should not have a definitive role in the development of Christian doctrine.

*Sola Scriptura* as a Protestant doctrine can be traced to the rise of Humanism during the Renaissance, which became instrumental in the Protestant Reformation. Texts published during the Renaissance had profound effects on the church during this time. Desiderius Erasmus' Greek edition of the New Testament *Novum Istrumentum*, was widely circulated and challenged the dominant Latin of the Roman Catholic Church. Erasmus' work was met with open hostility within the church, because a Greek version of the Bible challenged the very authority of the church by suggesting that there were other possible interpretations of the scriptures (Pettegree 2000).

#### ***“The Priesthood of all Believers”***

Martin Luther's radical notion of “the priesthood of all believers” from his 1520 text *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* suggests a reorganization of power within the church, contradicting the idea that priests in the Roman Catholic Church were *the* conduit for a connection with God and the divine realm. In fact, Luther dismisses what he viewed as the Roman Catholic Church's two-class system of those who are spiritual (the priests) and those who are temporal (all others). This worldview elevated the clergy to a sacred status, but more importantly it relegated laity to a social position that effectively made them meaningless and powerless. Luther sought to empower the laity by reinterpreting the church as an institution that like all other earthly institutions required oversight and governance by the people, or in this case the laity (Pettegree 2000).

Luther's call for this change in authority had the effect of questioning the unquestionable authority of the church and suggesting its replacement with an institution that is not only fallible, but which must in fact be held in check with the laity. This new form of governance would move the church from a centralized papal form of authority to a more regionalized governance that allowed, and eventually brought about, a diversity of religious expression and church order.

### ***The Use of the Vernacular***

Before the reformation, the mass was conducted completely in Latin, the language of the church. Few outside of the church knew Latin so Christian worship for the laity was relegated to an observation of the mysterious words and music of the priests. Following the doctrine of transubstantiation adopted at the fourth Lateran Council of 1215, many churches had rood screens installed to block the view of the priests and protect the host (consecrated bread) from possibly being consumed by the laity. Transubstantiation asserted that at the moment the bread and wine were consecrated, they actually became the body and blood of Christ. Protestants rejected transubstantiation and removed barriers like rood screens from churches.

Protestants also worshiped using the vernacular language, rejecting the Latin mass. For the first time, the predominately illiterate populations in Europe were able to hear scriptures, prayers and religious songs in their own native tongue. This radical change empowered a disenfranchised laity (Tracy 1999).

### ***The Printing Press***

The Renaissance expanded intellectual dialogue throughout Europe and sparked ideas and ideals that the Protestant reformers eventually adopted. To accomplish this mass educational reform required a technology that allowed the population to engage in the intellectual dialogue that ensued. That technology was the printing press. The moveable type press revolutionized the production of books, perhaps the most important new medium in modern history, and expanded literacy dramatically across Europe.

The movement from hand copying books on parchment to mass producing them on paper resulted in a dissemination of ideas across geographical spaces far wider than was previously allowed. The reduction of costs allowed for a wider community to engage in the exchange of ideas. In effect, the technology had a democratizing effect, although literacy and affordability roadblocks were still significant enough to limit universal inclusion.

Luther and other reformers used this new technology to advance their ideas and call for reform. They did not have a monopoly on the technology however. The church responded by printing pamphlets condemning the reformers work. The “pamphlet wars” ensued between 1520 and 1525 as the church and Reformers’ engaged in a war of

printed words (Ekelund, Hebert et al. 2006). The result was not only a multiplicity of churches that split from the Roman Catholic Church, but a greater literacy among the laity of Europe.

The significance of the development of the printing press cannot be underestimated. The ability to reproduce texts cheaply allowed the “common person” to become literate. It removed the church from making decisions about which texts were acceptable to reproduce<sup>2</sup>.

The printing press fueled the Protestant Reformation (Riddell 1998; Sample 1998; Slaughter 1998; Sweet 1999). Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979; 1983; 1986) contends that through the dissemination, standardization and preservation of texts, the printing press fueled not only the Protestant Reformation but also the Scientific Revolution and the Renaissance.

### **The Early American Religious Setting (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

Before the American Revolution the dominant religious influences in America were Puritans, Quakers, Roman Catholics, and the Church of England in most of the English colonies (Fischer 1989). During and following the Revolution, the Church of England was a very unpopular religious choice. The Church of England had assisted in the mass decline of the church by using the American colonies as a place to dispose of ineffective and troublesome priests.

The Methodists were a renewal group within the Church of England and as the Revolution approached they formed their own denomination to distance themselves from the unpopular Church of England. They did this under the protest of their founder, John Wesley, a Church of England priest.

In the 1730s and 1740s a religious fervor known as the Great Awakening spread across the colonies. Through revivals and the sermons of fiery preachers like Jonathan Edwards, involvement in churches grew significantly during this period. The Great Awakening was primarily located in the New England (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002).

Following the American Revolution, and benefitting from the Great Awakening, three denominations grew rapidly, taking advantage of the growing new nation. The

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<sup>2</sup> The Roman Catholic Church was the primary source or scribes who hand-copied texts.

Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians grew through the unconventional means of revivals and camp meetings. Their Evangelical fervor followed the westward movement of those who sought to expand the new nation.



**Figure 1. Methodist Camp Meeting (source [www.loc.org](http://www.loc.org)).**

### **The Camp Meetings (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

The camp meetings were part religious revival meeting and part religious spectacle. Organized to convert large numbers of people to Christianity, these events became the genesis of new churches throughout the country. They were a solution to the problem of too few clergy for the ever expanding frontier of America. At the same time they were a novel experiential worship endeavor. The following is an excerpt of a first-hand description of an 1806 camp meeting in Maryland:

The order of every day was as follows—At day break the Trumpets were blown round the Camp for the people to rise 20 minutes afterwards for family prayer at the dore of every tent—if fair weather—at sunrise they blew at the stand for public prayer, and then brakefasted. At 10 ocloc they blew for preaching—by 2 ocl. Dinner was to be over in every tent. At 3 ocl. preaching again, and again at night (Edwards 2004).

In addition to the long hours of preaching and prayer the camp meeting developed a specific spatial arrangement. This was codified in camp meeting manuals as this form of revival flourished. The basic arrangement (see Figure 1) needed a relatively level section of land for the erection of tents. People slept, ate and had special meetings in these tents, and central space was cleared to allow for benches to seat as many as would be expected to attend the revival. Finally the preacher required a raised platform from which to speak (Kilde 2002).

The spatial arrangement of the camp meetings produced a religious fervor that was interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of this form of Evangelical expression. This fervor was documented by Alexis de Tocqueville in his important text of America in the nineteenth century, *Democracy in America*:

Here and there in the midst of American society you meet with men full of a fanatical and almost wild spiritualism, which hardly exists in Europe. From time to time strange sects arise which endeavor to strike out extraordinary paths to eternal happiness. Religious insanity is very common in the United States (Tocqueville 1990).

The effectiveness of the camp meetings was measured not only in converts but by the numbers of churches built after these revivals which were often held in areas without existing churches. While the Methodists were a newly formed denomination in 1784, within a few decades they became the dominant Protestant denomination in America as a result of their camp meeting evangelism. This period of growth in churches is often referred to as the Second Great Awakening (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002).

### **The Mainline Denominations (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

At the end of the nineteenth century eight denominations dominated the religious landscape of America, in order of adherents: Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, and Congregational (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002). The three largest Protestant denominations (Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian) were fractured by internal strife concerning issues of governance, slavery, and doctrine.

By 1900 the American population was approximately 76 million. One-third of Americans were adherents to some form of religious community. Eighty percent of

those 26 million adherents were connected to one of the eight denominations above (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002). The domination of these religious faith communities has given them the label “Mainline” denominations.<sup>3</sup>

The growth of denominations in the nineteenth century was significant but was eclipsed by the phenomenal growth of the first half of the twentieth century both in numbers and percentage of population.

At the beginning of the twentieth century about one-third of the nation’s population could be found on the membership rolls of the churches and synagogues. By the middle of that century, membership had increased to well over 50 percent. In that same fifty-year period, the population as a whole doubled, from around 76 million to over 150 million...The eight “mainstream” denominations all participated dramatically in that growth: Catholics from 8 million to over 25 million; Methodists from 5.5 million to twice that; Baptists from 4 million to more than 15 million (passing the Methodists); Presbyterians from 1.5 million to over 3 million; Lutherans from fewer than 1.5 million to more than 5 million; Disciples from fewer than 1 million to about 4 million; Episcopalians and Congregationalists from well under a million to around 3 million and 2 million, respectively (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002).

This enormous expansion by the Mainline denominations has been referred to as the Third Great Awakening.

Growth in religious adherents during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries corresponded to a growth in church edifices. The churches’ buildings often started as small wooden structures called Meetinghouses often consisting of just a single room. These structures were crude and simple. Their function was simply to provide shelter for the worshipping community. As churches became more established the edifices became more permanent and significantly more ornate (Fenimore 1993).

### **Church Architecture**

Construction of Evangelical churches in the nineteenth century reflected the utilitarian needs of these churches as well as their ideology. Regardless of denominational affiliation the Evangelical churches, predominately Methodists, Baptists

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<sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic Church is not commonly referred to as a Mainline denomination. The distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism is significant enough to consider Roman Catholicism as a distinct entity.

and Presbyterians, designed and constructed churches that incorporated large open theatre-like auditoriums reminiscent of the camp meetings by which they began. The churches were multifunctional, often serving as both church and civic auditorium.

Evangelical architecture expressed the unique American experience of the Gilded Age. Evangelicals were growing and with numerical growth came financial prosperity. This was reflected in the design of worship spaces.

Evangelicals infused a strong material element into their expression of the divine and their beliefs. The integration of material life and religion is strongly emphasized in the introduction of new technologies, indicative of scientific advancement, into church buildings. From acoustical designs to state-of-the-art heating and cooling systems, from recessible doors to rolling partitions to electric lighting and mechanized cleaning systems, churches were showcases of architectural and mechanical innovation...These were not reactionary people clinging to past forms, but progressive ones endeavoring to reconcile or coordinate their belief in a divine being whose Word must be spread via the contemporary contexts in which they lived (Kilde 2002).

Evangelicals were united in many ways. Their national identity and prosperity connected them, but their primary concern was the religious fervor to provide space for the dissemination of the message. The design of churches highlighted the preacher as the source of connection to the divine. The need to connect with the preacher led to material structures that both provided extremely good acoustics but also emphasized the need to feel as close as possible to the preacher.



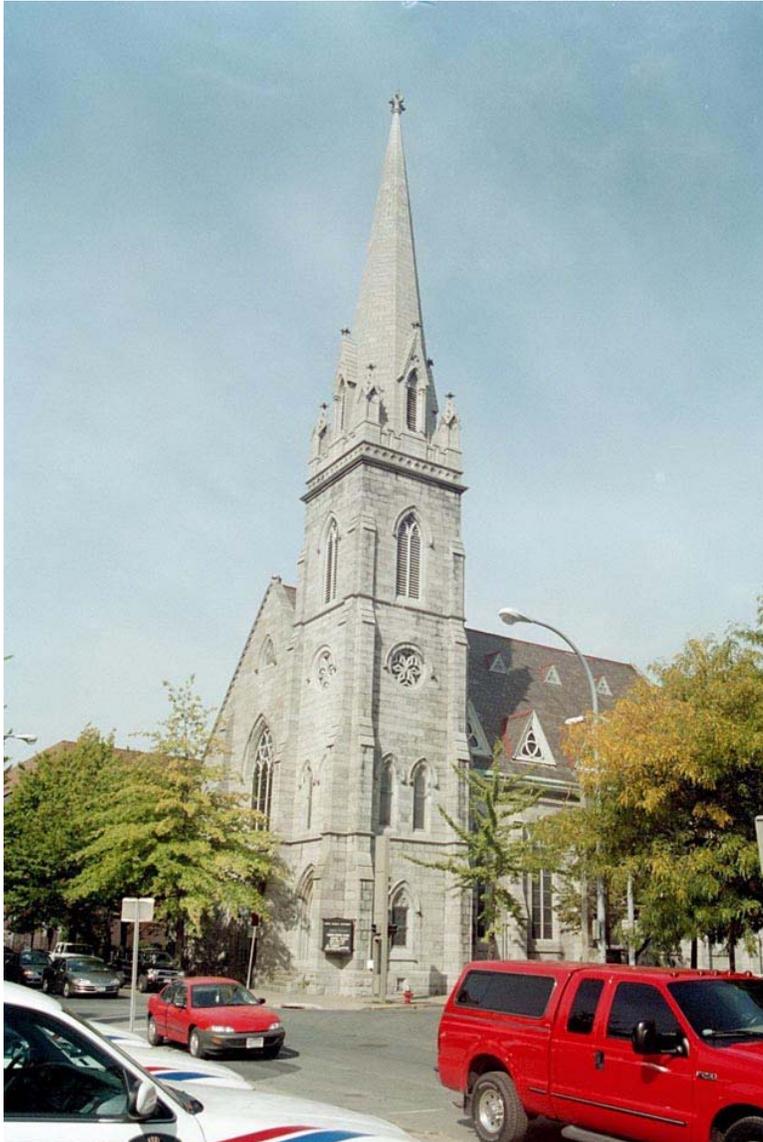
**Figure 2. Example of Evangelical Architecture - The Moody Church, Chicago (source: D. Kyoko 2008).**

This auditorium form of Evangelical architecture disappeared almost as quickly as it appeared.

Given that it reinforced and broadcast a class and time-specific ideology, it is not surprising that the neomedieval auditorium church remained popular only for a brief period. Peaking in the 1890s, its popularity diminished steadily after the turn of the twentieth century. Only a handful of examples were completed after 1910. The church type lost its popularity for two reasons: The religious agendas and the Evangelical alliances that the buildings embodied and broadcast waned, and at the same time, architects, church art critics, and designers embraced new criteria for both aesthetics and function (Kilde 2002).

The Evangelical denominations rapidly moved away from their frontier and camp meeting revival days. Churches sought the status of established institutions and their architectural design reflected this desire. In the beginning of the twentieth century the dominant architectural design was Gothic revival. Reflecting the Gothic Revival of

England, churches in America were being modeled after Christianity's first unique architectural form. Cathedral-like structures were constructed throughout the country. Steeples rose from cities and churches competed for the tallest steeple (Fenimore 1993).



**Figure 3. Christ Church, Troy, NY - A Gothic Revival Style Church (Fenimore 2003).**

These Gothic Revival structures incorporated a completely different spatial arrangement. The seating was often in straight lines with fixed pews. The seats were orderly and reflected the spatial arrangements of European cathedrals. These churches, by their architecture, embodied the traditional and established presence within a

community that was far beyond their years. It often took a generation to build a cathedral in Europe. With the modern construction techniques of the late nineteenth century these building could be erected in a fraction of that time. The buildings were not in fact replicas of cathedrals; instead, they only superficially incorporated Gothic features.<sup>4</sup>

## **Fundamentalism**

Divisions plagued the Evangelical churches as the traditional Evangelicals were faced with a new form of Evangelical, the Fundamentalist. Although what is known today as Fundamentalism was developing throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, it coalesced in 1925 at the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee. This trial of a local biology teacher for teaching evolution gained national attention and highlighted the division between modernists and biblical literalists. It was actually three years earlier that the term Fundamentalist entered the religious lexicon, when Harry Emerson Fosdick preached a sermon entitled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002).

Although Scopes lost his case and the Fundamentalists won in the courtroom, they lost in wider public opinion. Fundamentalist Christians understood that the world was moving toward modernism; yet they were diametrically opposed to the modernist worldview (Gilbert 1997). Their solution was to develop a sub-culture within America that refused to engage with the culture. Their society within a society was all-encompassing. It was possible for a child to grow up in a normal town in America and never experience anyone but Fundamentalists. Fundamentalists would only do business with, socialize with, and worship with other Fundamentalists. Schools were developed to keep children out of the public education system. Business directories were distributed to ensure that only other Fundamentalists were employed to provide business services (Balmer 1989; Harding 2000).

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<sup>4</sup> For example, structures like Christ Church (Figure 8) incorporated flying buttresses into the design but they were only decorative, not functional support for the buildings.

Fundamentalism did not arise completely outside of the denominational structures. Many denominations were deeply divided over the clash between modernism and fundamentalism.

In the first third of the twentieth century, the three Protestant groups most severely torn by Fundamentalist-modernist issues were the Presbyterians, the Northern Baptists, and the Disciples of Christ. Other bodies did not escape unscathed but did escape without enduring schism...Methodists, drained of many of their most ardent Evangelicals through the Holiness churches, weathered the storm somewhat better, though not without charges and countercharges hurled by liberals and conservatives alike in the 1920s and 1930s (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002).

The divisions tearing apart the denominations were at heart issues of Biblical interpretation. The reformation had refuted tradition for *sola scriptura*. New archeological evidence combined with literary and historical criticism of Biblical texts created divergent and often contradictory views of biblical texts. The result of this “interpretation divide” was a fracturing of the churches. The traditional Evangelicals had become the “Mainline” adherents and, for the most part, followed the historical and literary interpretations of the Bible. Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians were now the status quo, the respectable institutional church. They affirmed the newest teachings in Biblical criticism and rejected the literal interpretations of the Fundamentalists.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Mainline denominations began to focus on social justice issues. This shift was a significant movement away from the Evangelical roots of seeking converts to a transformative social agenda. It coincided with the Temperance movement and Women’s Suffrage and was not universally welcomed. A new breed of Evangelical arose, who engaged with the culture in order to seek a transformation of society, a contrast to the Fundamentalists who separated themselves from society.

### **Feminization, Secularization and the Decline of Mainline Churches**

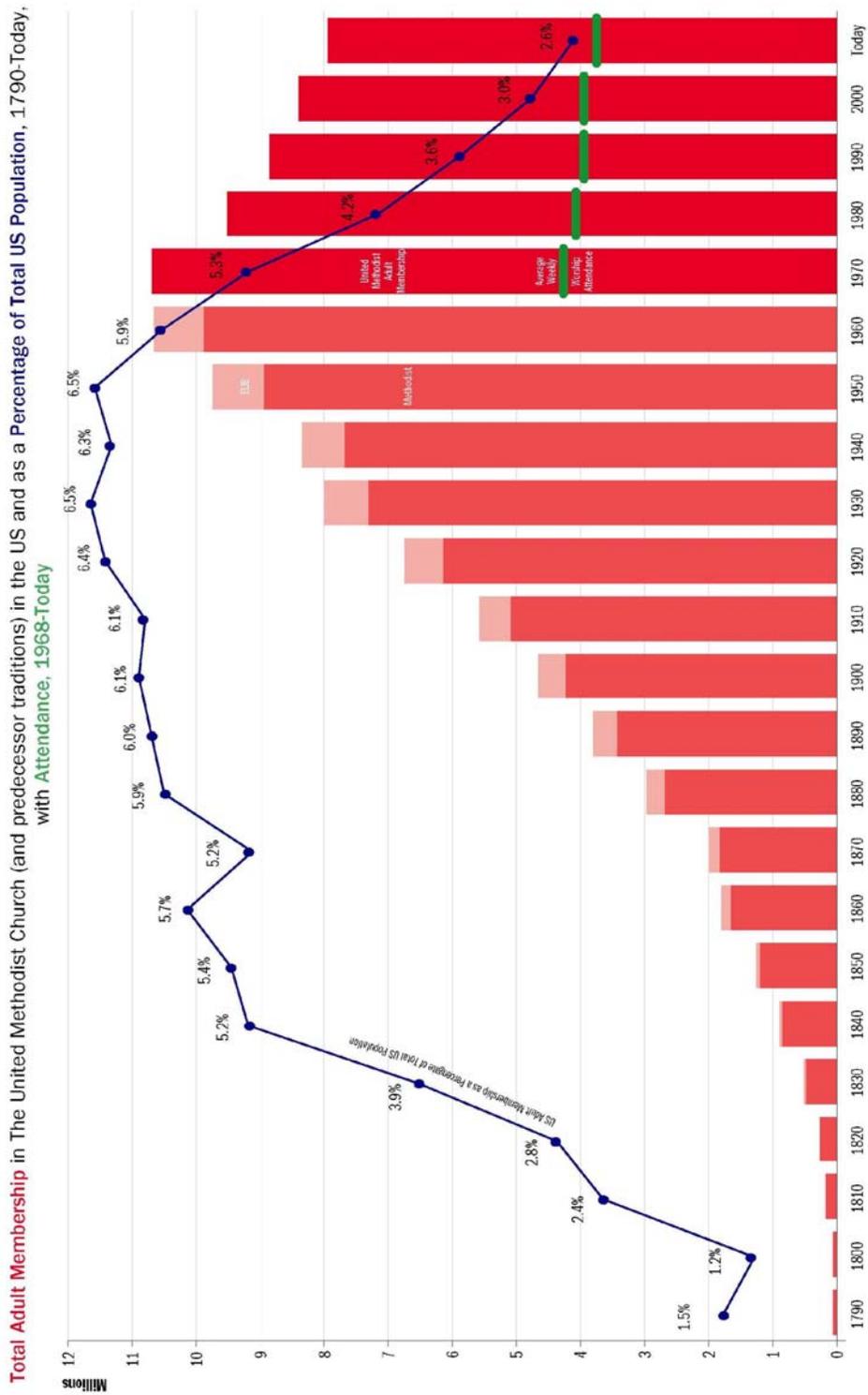
Ann Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977) describes how two powerless groups, women and clergy, worked together to influence arts and literature significantly. Their influence was far greater than Douglas documents, however. Clergy, especially liberal clergy, played significant roles in the First Wave of Feminism, the Suffrage movement. Their eventual success in the Suffrage movement led to the

Temperance movement and the passing of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment - Prohibition (1920-1933). This alliance of liberal clergy and women congregants also had a role, although much smaller, in the Second Wave of Feminism (1960s – 1980s), but led to significant response from more conservative Christians in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The rise of the new Evangelicals at the same period of time as the Second Wave of Feminism is no coincidence. Conservative Mainline Christians left their Mainline churches for the socially conservative Evangelical churches by the millions.

Late in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as the church experienced the effects of secularization, all avenues of civic and religious participation declined. Robert Putnam in his *Bowling Alone* (2000) writes,

...over the last three to four decades Americans have become about 10 percent less likely to claim church membership, while our actual attendance and involvement in religious activities has fallen roughly 25 to 50 percent (Putnam 2000).

The impact of both a significant decline in religious participation and a massive movement from Mainline to Evangelical churches led to a battle for the religious convert. For United Methodists, the second largest denomination in the U.S., the decline has been significant over the past fifty years. At its height in 1957 the United Methodist Church included 6.5% of the U.S. population on its membership rolls. In 2008, that number fell significantly to 2.6% (see Figure 4).

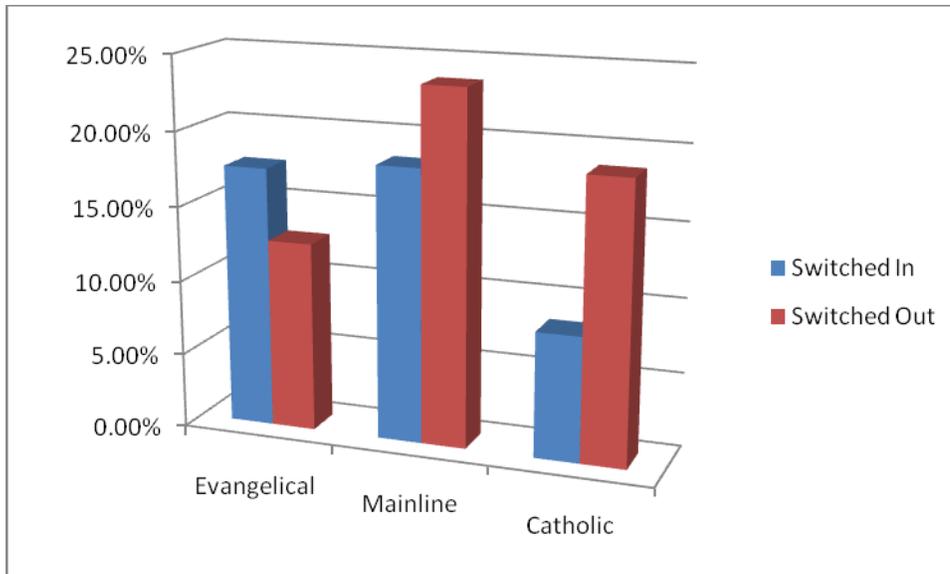


**Figure 4. UMC Membership as percentage of US Population (Source: UM Church).**

Membership in a denomination is not the most effective statistic, especially in older denominations. In Mainline denominations it is common for the average weekly attendance to be one-third (or even less) of the membership count. In Evangelical churches this ratio can often be reversed with attendance three-times the number of members. The enormous difference between these two can be attributed to the way a church defines membership. In many Evangelical churches membership requires a significant investment in time and financial resources. For example, these churches often require that members tithe (give 10% of their income) to the church.

Church attendance is the statistic needed to understand effectively the shift of adherents from Mainline to Evangelical churches. Gallup pollsters have tracked church attendance since 1939. The overall attendance has been fluctuated over the years but has always stayed in the range of 40-48% of the total U.S. population. The problem with church attendance numbers is that respondents to surveys regarding their church going behavior are often untruthful. A recent study by Kirk Hadaway and Penny Marler estimated that the over-reporting in Gallup (and other opinion polls) was as much as 100% (Hadaway and Marler 2005). In fact they estimate that overall worship attendance in 2000 is approximately 20.7%. Further they would break down Mainline attendance at 4% and Evangelical attendance at 5.3% of the total U.S. population (Hadaway and Marler 2005).

An additional factor to consider is the shift in membership between Mainline churches and Evangelical churches. Based on the *American Religious Identification Survey of 2001* (Kosmin, Mayer et al. 2001) there have been significant losses from both Mainline and Roman Catholic churches as people have shifted away from these churches. At the same time, the Evangelical churches have gained more than they have lost from the shifts resulting in a net gain of adherents from the Mainline churches and Roman Catholic churches (see Figure 5). This shift and the associated growth of the Evangelical churches has been called the Fourth Great Awakening (Fogel 2002).



**Figure 5. Percentage Switching from one Group to Another (Kosmin, Mayer et al. 2001; Olson 2008).**

### **The Rise of the New Evangelicals & the Charismatic Leader**

The new Evangelicals were found both within and outside of the Mainline denominations. Many denominations found themselves deeply divided between Evangelicals and progressive Mainliners. Separating from Mainline denominations or simply forming their own churches, these groups were guided by two foundational principles - *sola scriptura* and a mission to convert the world. Guided by scripture, their mission was quite simply to convert all whom they encountered. This was to be accomplished by any means necessary. The medium of the message simply didn't matter, as it was of paramount importance to spread the message.

Without a denominational structure these churches were often founded by individual charismatic preachers. The churches' theological heritage reflected the theological heritage of the preacher. Frequently churches would espouse an eclectic mix of theological traditions based on the experience and training of their leader. Identity for these churches was no longer rooted in a denomination or a church but in a person.

One important Evangelical figure of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was never associated with any particular church: Billy Graham, a Southern Baptist itinerant evangelist whose ministry and influence spanned a period of 60 years. Graham's rise to prominence can

be attributed to his widely successful “Crusades.” Graham’s crusades were the modern day equivalent of camp meetings.

Graham represented an Evangelicalism that was distinct from the Fundamentalism that developed in the beginning of the twentieth century. Graham preached an Evangelical theology but made strong connections with Mainline denominations and Roman Catholicism. Graham put a respectable face on Evangelical theology that was often ridiculed as backward and theologically mediocre.

A case can be made that during the mid-fifties a kind of Evangelical excitement took hold in Mainline Protestantism that harked back to the days before Scopes, when “the evangelization of the world in this generation” was a goal establishmentarians could happily embrace. With liberalism (read: modernism) on the run in the loftiest theological circles, those who professed The Fundamentals were no longer so easily dismissed: by his classic revivalist’s willingness to ignore doctrine and institutional barriers in gathering his forces, Graham proved capable of enlisting the support of sophisticated clergy as well as layfolk throughout the Mainline denominations (Silk 2006).

Graham’s connection with a broad theological spectrum was not just a superficial relationship. Deviating from other Evangelicals, Graham spoke out on social justice issues, winning praise from Mainline leaders and condemnation from Fundamentalists. Graham was a strong supporter of the civil rights movement and refused to speak at venues that required segregation.

### **Televangelists**

Oral Roberts, a Pentecostal Holiness<sup>5</sup> preacher, gained his fame through a radio program called the “Healing Waters.” By 1953, thanks to a deal with the American Broadcasting Company, the program was broadcast on more than 500 radio stations across the nation. Roberts held tent revival services during which he would “heal” those who came forward at the end of the service. Roberts’ radio program was also dedicated to healing people via the radio waves.

Roberts recognized the impressive power of the medium of television. In 1954 Roberts taped a series of television broadcasts that were essentially a television version

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<sup>5</sup> Pentecostalism is a form of evangelical Christianity distinguished by the belief that adherents when filled with the Holy Spirit will exhibit “spiritual gifts” including healing and speaking in tongues.

of his radio show. They failed miserably. Roberts was unable to navigate successfully the different medium. A friend convinced him to tape several of his revivals, later that year and broadcast edited versions of these. This was a success and established him as the premier healing television evangelist (Harrell 1993).

The success of Roberts and other Evangelicals was their willingness to experiment with novel methods and technologies. Under the banner of seeking conversion “by whatever means,” Evangelicals of the twentieth century took advantage of rapid technological changes.

...Oral was always willing to innovate. His introduction of the entertainment format to religious programming in prime time was a dangerous gamble. He knew that he would offend some of his Pentecostal supporters: indeed, he left the Pentecostal Holiness church partly because he feared official sanctions from the church once the programs aired (Harrell 1993).

This new model of “broadcasting” a worship service opened a new market for Evangelicals. Today, television stations are flooded with worship services from all across the country and beyond. The broadcast ministry of many of these churches is an integral part of their Evangelical mission and ministry. Broadcast ministry allows for conversion without a person even stepping into a church. But broadcasting a worship service is an extremely costly endeavor; these churches have invested millions of dollars in broadcast technology and the constant upgrades needed.

## Megachurch Architecture



**Figure 6. A Megachurch - Church of the Resurrection UMC Leawood, KS (Source: Fenimore 2004)**

Evangelical church architecture of the late twentieth century reflects a return to the auditorium style architecture of the nineteenth century. The difference between the old and new style is scale. Megachurches are often large enough to seat thousands at a time. The intimacy once provided in old auditoriums through a close proximity to the preacher is replaced by the television camera and large projection screen. It may be not be feasible for thousands to view the facial expressions of the preacher directly but through projection technology the preacher's face is magnified enough so that congregants can see every nuanced facial expression.

Technologically-mediated Evangelical worship is a spectacle of sight and sound. These churches communicate through their architecture and their incorporation of new communication technologies.

...many new religious auditoriums eschew such architectural spectacle as too indicative of traditional churches and opt instead for other means of creating an entertaining visual spectacle. Willow Creek, devoid of permanent decoration, relies upon moveable scenery and props to enhance performances. Giant video screens flanking the stage can be used to project images that illustrate the oratorical performance...In addition, theatrical lighting techniques are used to transform musical numbers into visual light shows. Similarly, skits are enhanced with video projections and lighting. Visual spectacle then remains a critical element in Evangelical services, and while contemporary leaders might speak much more freely about the need to entertain their audiences than did their late nineteenth-century counterparts, their goals remain quite similar (Kilde 2002).

The visual spectacle is carefully constructed and is what Wajcman (1991) refers to as the “built environment.” It is the attention to detail that all lights, scenery, props, etc. are used to communicate, or at least enhance, the message. Their goal is quite simply the communication of the Evangelical message to all. Over the centuries the media employed have changed, but the goal has not.

### **Digital Display Technologies and Mainline Churches**

In an effort to compete with the growing Evangelical churches, many Mainline churches began converting their worship spaces into multimedia screening rooms. According to The Barna Group, by 2005 62% of all churches used a large-screen projection system in worship. This is a significant increase from just five years earlier when 39% reported using one. Additionally, Barna discovered that over that five year period, Mainline churches increased at double the rate of other churches (Group 2005). Mainline Christian worship, which had relied primarily on oral communication, sacred texts, and sacred spaces, is now being assisted by multimedia “experiences” geared to attract younger members. Cultural relevance, and an almost desperate need for new members (and the finances that accompany them), has led to a wholesale acceptance of almost any means that might draw the elusive “younger generation” back to the church. A graying congregation, combined with a cumbersome and costly institutional structure, has prompted a search for the magic elixir that will revive the church, and many consider media ministry this elixir.

The success of Evangelical churches led Mainline churches to replicate their worship style and use of media. Popular Protestant theologians (Riddell 1998; Sample 1998; Slaughter 1998; Sweet 1999) have given theological justifications for the adoption of technology. Using the analogy of the adoption of the printing press as the fuel of the Protestant Reformation, they claim this media reformation will be as revolutionary as the Protestant Reformation.

### **The Business of Media Ministry**

As churches launched new worship services incorporating graphics and video, a new industry was formed to provide resources to other churches in the technology needed to replicate this style of worship. These businesses sold and adapted equipment produced for a business market. The challenge for these entrepreneurs was to provide hardware, customized software and training (for church volunteers) at an affordable price. The first companies started in the late 1990s and their number grew substantially at the turn of the millennium.

Projector technology of adequate strength and affordability, is a limiting factor to the development and expansion of media ministry. Projectors have increased their output (measured in lumens) 87% each year and at the same time their cost has decreased 41% per year since 1993. In 1993 for each \$1000 spent the return would be 10 lumens. A 1000 lumen projector would cost \$100,000, far outside the reach of churches. By 1999, that figure had changed to 200 lumens for every \$1000. In 2007 the figure was 2000 lumens per \$1000<sup>6</sup>(Kahn 1999).

The combined rapid growth in projector strength and significant decline in price made this technology available, not only to large churches, but for much smaller churches. By the end of 2003, there were more than 41,000 churches that were using projectors in some way in their worship services.<sup>7</sup>

Two related technologies allowed for the rapid increase of video projector use: Video cameras and overhead projectors. Many of the largest churches in the U.S. had a broadcast ministry to expand the reach of the physical church. These churches,

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<sup>6</sup> These figures come from the SPIE (Society of Photographic Instrumentation Engineers) conference proceedings.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Lou Douros and Derek Clark, August 10, 2004.

primarily Fundamentalist and Evangelical, were filming their worship services and broadcasting them on television. The addition of video projectors to project what was being filmed onto a local screen led to a practice known as IMAG, Image MAGnification. Some of these churches used CRT (Cathode Ray Tube) projectors which allowed video but not computer images to be projected on a screen. These were very expensive and not very bright (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) Projector (source: [www.gttgroup.com](http://www.gttgroup.com))**

In the 1970s and 80s overhead projectors were used primarily in nondenominational Evangelical churches to project lyrics of songs. The music of these churches was not often found in hymn books and the books were costly for these newly forming churches. The overhead projector provided a flexibility that did not restrict the churches to specific songs and also provided for increased numbers of people in worship. Legal issues regarding copyright began to surface in the late 1980s and early 1990s which required churches to purchase licenses to project lyrics based on the size of the worshipping congregation. The first generation of LCD projectors worked in combination with the overhead projector, by placing a clear LCD panel on top of an

overhead projector and controlling it with a computer to generate the screen. These screens were not very bright and were very expensive. (see Figure 8) Use of these projectors was short lived and by the early 1990s they were replaced with the current multifunctional digital video projectors.



**Figure 8. LCD Panel used with Overhead Projector (source: [www.case.hu-berlin.de](http://www.case.hu-berlin.de))**

## **Summary**

The Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) provided the crucial foundation for the development of media ministry in the twenty-first century. Its guiding principles of *sola scriptura* and the “priesthood of all believers” effectively freed the church from the dominating influence of tradition on Christian practice. Fueled by the technology of the printing press, and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular and the spread of literacy, the laity became empowered with a religious Evangelical zeal.

On the frontier of a fledging America, Protestant Christianity grew significantly through camp meetings and other evangelistic revivals. As these denominations, primarily Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian grew, they became established institutions within these newfound growing communities. By the end of the nineteenth century the traditional Evangelical denominations became the Mainline denominations focused more on self-preservation than expansion. Their architecture reflected an established church that was both respectable and venerable. Their commitment to social justice and acceptance of higher criticism of the Bible led to schism.

Fundamentalists arose in opposition to the Mainline churches, reasserting *sola scriptura* as a foundational principle. These separatists resisted the modernist culture and established a society within a society. New Evangelicals not willing to separate society like the Fundamentalists, nor adopt the higher criticism that rejected a literal interpretation of the Bible, began their own churches primarily around charismatic Evangelical preachers.

Many of the charismatic preachers adopted new forms of communication technologies including radio and television. Their success in these media can be attributed to their willingness to use any media available to communicate their message. Charismatic preachers became televangelists as they adopted the medium of television. Their churches reflected a new architecture (which was really the old architecture of the previous century), that provided an experience incorporating both digital display technologies and charismatic appeal.

Mainline churches which had been declining for decades began to look at the success of the Evangelical churches to find ways to incorporate their practices. The Mainline churches assumed that they could adopt the medium of communication and not the message.

## Chapter 2

### *Ginghamsburg: An Evangelical Pioneer*

I first heard the phrase “media ministry” in 1998. I, like many others, learned about this new worship form from a rapidly growing Evangelical church in Ohio. I later learned that neither the phrase nor the form of worship started there. What Ginghamsburg did was to popularize the use of media in worship settings and to develop a pattern of worship that has been widely accepted in many churches throughout the United States. What follows is an ethnography of an Evangelical church.

The story of Ginghamsburg reflects a familiar story in Evangelical Christianity. It has the key elements found in many of these stories: a charismatic leader, dramatic, rapid, against-all-odds scenario for growth. What follows is an attempt to piece together the story of Ginghamsburg by those who experienced the changes in mediated delivery that occurred in the past decade. I interviewed staff (past and present) and longtime congregants to understand the effects of the changes in media.

For as long as anyone can remember, Ginghamsburg was a “teaching church,” providing a part-time job and field education for those entering the ministry while studying at United Theological Seminary, a United Methodist seminary in Dayton. As one member commented, nothing really got started because every few years there would be a change in pastors when a new Seminarian began.<sup>8</sup> The church was declining for as long as anyone could remember and by mid-1970s only 20 people attended.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Lucille Heitzman, 20 May 2004.



**Figure 9. Original Ginghamburg Church (Fenimore 2004).**

The people of Ginghamburg were proud of their service to raise and train pastors, but they seriously considered closing their doors until a pastor named Jim Morreli came. He grew the church to about 80 people in his 3-4 years and by the time he left he was employed as full-time pastor at Ginghamburg.<sup>9</sup> Michael Slaughter, a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary, who had only worked as a Youth Pastor before this assignment, was then hired as the next full-time pastor in 1979. The focus of the church at that time was on the youth and Michael Slaughter brought skills in that ministry area. In 1981, Michael Nightlen was hired as a youth pastor to assist at the church. The youth program grew dramatically under Michael Nightlen's leadership. The youth brought their parents to worship and before long a new space had to be built

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with John Ward, 24 May 2004.

for worship.<sup>10</sup> In 1984 the Discipleship Center was built behind the original church building to provide space for the growing congregation.



**Figure 10. Discipleship Center built in 1984 (Fenimore 2004)**

Before long the church began offering multiple services, each of which was standing room only. In the latter half of the 1980s each of the services was geared to a different demographic. One was more traditional while one was geared toward twenty-somethings. There was some shifting in service style, but eventually the church moved toward one form of service offered at multiple times. During this time the congregation grew mostly through the youth and children's programs. The congregation decided to build a new building, and a site was chosen a few miles away in Tipp City, allowing for expansion and plenty of parking.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 11. New Church Built in 1994 (Fenimore 2004).**

The new worship space is 56,000 sq. ft. and cost \$5.6 million to build. It was completed in 1994 with the first service held on Christmas Eve. Ironically, the space was not designed to use a projector; this was an addition added late in the building stage. This is evident in skylights in the sanctuary that needed to be permanently covered to decrease natural light and allow the screen to be brighter.

Another late addition to the building construction was a media room to house the projector and other media equipment. At first this was to be on the balcony level but was moved one level higher to a storage space, allowing more room for people to sit in the balcony. This removed the video technicians from the midst of the congregants.

The projector was purchased as a reject from Bill Gates, 1994 and was so large that a crane was needed to lower into place. It was designed to be used in an air conditioned room as it became very hot. They tried to use fans to cool the projector but

this caused dust to be blown onto the lens, cutting the lifespan of the bulbs.<sup>11</sup> The projector is a 2,500 lumen<sup>12</sup> projector then valued at \$65,000. The church, however, purchased the projector for less than \$50,000.



**Figure 12. Ginghamburg Sanctuary Interior Taken from Media Room. (Fenimore 2004).**

Ginghamburg still did not have anyone on staff who was trained to use the new equipment. Mike Gibbs, the Missions Pastor, was in charge of the technology at the time, but not because of any particular knowledge; he just had an interest in the technology. The entire video production was run by volunteers under the direction of Mike Gibbs for six months until Len Wilson was hired in 1995.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Jerry Warner, 13 May 2004.

<sup>12</sup> The lumen is the standard measurement of brightness of a projector. As a point of reference a standard 100 watt light bulb measures approximately 1700 lumens. A 2500 lumen projector still requires a room to be darkened in order to see the image on the screen.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Len Wilson, 18 June 2004.

Len Wilson has a degree in Communication and a Master of Arts in Religious Communication from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. It has been said that Len was hired to get the projector in focus. Wilson was hired six months after the new projector was installed and the images were fuzzy and slightly green. Wilson worked to correct this, but he had much grander plans. He wrote his own vision statement which included the goal to “develop media literacy where other staff could produce their own media in the same way that they have text literacy.”<sup>14</sup>

About the same time Michael Slaughter was developing a team of individuals to help design worship each week – The Design Team. Slaughter gathered together a large team, nearly a dozen people, mostly senior staff at the church. This group of “department heads” as Wilson refers to them, became an unwieldy group to manage. Slaughter put his Administrative Assistant, Debra Welder, in charge of the Design Team. Welder was far more than an administrative assistant; over the years, Welder became a trusted part of the inner circle called the Lead Team that provided much of the managerial and organizational direction of Ginghamburg. In 1995 church attendance was averaging about 1,000 people per weekend.

During the first year of using a video projector in worship, the basic use of the projector was for projection of song lyrics (which were white text on a black background), and IMAG (Image Magnification of what the cameras were recording).<sup>15</sup>

By 1996, the Design Team was reduced to a much smaller group that included, among others, Michael Slaughter, Jeff Bray (the volunteer band leader), Len Wilson, Debra Welder, and Kim Miller. This new, smaller team was able to plan more effectively and more creatively. One of the elements they began to introduce was the use of story. Instead of using the technology to produce informational pieces in place of announcements, they began producing pieces that included both visuals and text to connect with the message for the day. On Easter 1996, Wilson produced the first video clip used in worship. Using an old Hi8 video camera and a VHS tape deck he was able to piece together the video.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Video production and the use of narrative elements in worship were not the only innovative ideas at Ginghamburg. The team was also pushing the edge of what could be claimed as “church music.” In 1996, a video for use in worship was produced that included Dishwalla’s *Counting Blue Cars* as the background music on the video.<sup>16</sup> From that moment on, so-called secular songs were often included in the worship service, sometimes as background music, often as special music pieces during the collection of the offering.

The church underwent a dramatic increase during the next couple of years. By 1998, the weekend attendance was about 3000. Jeff Bray was still a volunteer and the church began to consider hiring Jeff as the full-time director of the band. At the same time Bray and Slaughter’s assistant, Welder, began dating. A disagreement ensued over Bray’s equipment and whether or not the church should have to pay for it and the end result was both Bray and Welder left Ginghamburg, a huge loss for the congregation in both leadership and worship development. Kim Miller, who had been a volunteer at Ginghamburg for several years, was hired in 1998 to replace Welder and was named Creative Director. She took on the role of leading the Design Team and quickly became the decision maker for worship design and overall creativity at Ginghamburg.

This new team consisted of Kim Miller, Michael Slaughter, Len Wilson, Fran Wyatt (newly hired director of music) and Jason Moore (newly hired graphics and animation creator). Len Wilson called this Team Version 2.0.<sup>17</sup> This new team increased the use of visual arts in the worship service. With two full-time staff dedicated to the development of media, the congregation began to see very professional video, graphics, and animations. During this time, however congregation growth remained flat at about 3,000 per weekend.

In 2000, Wilson and Moore announced that they were leaving Ginghamburg to become part of a new media production company called Lumicon Digital Productions. The company also included a former professor of Wilson’s from United Theological Seminary, Tom Boomershine, and his wife, Amelia Cooper. The goal of the company

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Kim Miller, 25 May 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Len Wilson, 18 June 2004.

was to provide media (video and graphics) for churches that wanted to move into this form of worship but couldn't afford a staff of videographers and graphic artists.

At Ginghamburg, this meant that a new team needed to be developed. Todd Carter, who has a background in video production and was working at Ginghamburg as a Discipleship Media producer, producing videos for other ministries outside of worship, was asked to take on the Media Director position in 2000. Brent Thurston was hired as the graphics producer to replace Jason Moore. This then made up Team Version 3.0: Michael Slaughter, Fran Wyatt, Kim Miller, Todd Carter and Brent Thurston.

During the next four years, from 2000 to 2004, media production continued to increase until there was at least one original video each week and dozens of original graphic slides used in a worship service. Worship attendance grew to about 3,200 each weekend.

In 2006, staff change occurred again; three of the five major figures on the Design Team were changed as more staff left and new ones were hired. Todd Carter, Brent Thurston and Fran Wyatt left Ginghamburg and were replaced making Team Version 4.0. During the first decade in the new building with the new video technology, four different teams to design worship services came and went. The only consistency was Michael Slaughter and Kim Miller. By 2006 worship attendance had grown to approximately 4,000 each weekend.

The congregation is primarily white and middle-class. Miami County is 95.8% Caucasian; this demographic is reflected in the congregational demographics. The congregation has a mix of ages but is dominated by younger and middle-aged adults with children.

### **The Role of Technology in the Success of Ginghamburg**

Ginghamburg has grown significantly in a relatively short time span. The success of the church is primarily attributed to Michael Slaughter, who is depicted as a celebrity (preacher) and yet highly approachable. He is a charismatic leader. Max Weber defines charismatic authority “vested in a person by virtue of popular belief in extraordinary personal qualities (Rojek 2001).” Slaughter is portrayed, both in the origin story and in the weekly worship services, as a magical figure, revered and deified. He is

described as a “visionary”<sup>18</sup> or “a dreamer”<sup>19</sup> and his image is projected onto the screen larger than life (see Figure 13).

As a pastor I understood that the use of digital display technologies and “media ministry” was the primary reason for the growth of the church. From those interviewed, however, technology is not the salvation for the church. Rather, it is the church’s ability to be culturally relevant. Cultural relevance is an important Evangelical trope that is found in many Evangelical church success stories.

According to interviews it was the youth program preceding the addition of digital display technologies that began the growth of Ginghamburg.<sup>20</sup> The development of a strong youth program that brought both youth and their parents to the church was the initial drive for growth at Ginghamburg. The role of digital display technologies was to enhance cultural relevance and especially the “larger than life” charismatic leader of Michael Slaughter.

### **The Production of Worship Services**

At Ginghamburg the use of technology in worship and the implementation of a worship Design Team to develop worship occurred at roughly the same time. This step was not accidental. The use of the technology required a new level of coordination. To integrate technology into worship required planning and a group to ensure that the visual media and the message for the day coincided. During May 2004, I was given unprecedented access to Ginghamburg, including their process for developing worship each week. For three weeks I was included in all the gatherings that produced the services for the week. The following is a detailed description of the methodology used to produce a worship service at Ginghamburg.

Planning sessions begin with the Lead Pastor, Michael Slaughter presenting to the team the “seed idea” that will become the service (Slaughter 1998). What I discovered is that often the day before the team gathers, Michael Slaughter and Kim Miller meet and begin to work on the sermon idea. They do some of the brainstorming

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with John Ward, 24 May 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Lucille Heitzman, 20 May 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Jerry Warner, 13 May 2004.

in advance so that the team has something more substantive to work with. This doesn't seem to be a formal structure but it occurs frequently.

### ***Design Team***

The first gathering of the team usually occurs on Wednesday morning. While I was there the team consisted of: Lead Pastor, Creative Director, Senior Media Producer, Graphics Producer and Band Leader. The process always began with a discussion of the previous week's worship services. The discussion was mostly concerned with technical issues and issues that concerned the flow of the service (how the message was presented and received).

Then attention was turned to the coming service. Then Michael Slaughter (or the preacher for that week) leads a discussion of the theme for the message. The scripture is read and an outline of the sermon and the main points is presented. There was never much discussion about the content of the sermon. Slaughter seemed to be seeking feedback that confirmed his direction and I never witnessed anything other than positive reinforcement. Slaughter's presentation of the material would take quite some time, often longer than the actual sermon.

Discussion was then opened to the group to brainstorm ways to connect songs, graphics and videos with this message. This was a true, open process that allowed people to share ideas and have them discarded or embraced as potential elements of the service. All the media (visual and auditory) were to be illustrative of the message idea presented.

At some point in the conversation, usually after several hours, Kim Miller, Creative Director, would write on the whiteboard the following: "Series", "Word", "Felt Need", "Desired Outcome", "Theme", "Metaphor/Look." Each of these headings was carefully filled out. The Series referred to the particular ongoing sermon series. This was something new to Ginghamburg. During 2003-2004, the team had moved toward a series of worship services tied together with the same look and a common overarching theme. While I was there in May 2004 the theme was "Purpose Driven Relationships" – a play on the bestselling "Purpose Driven Church" material by Rick Warren of Saddleback Church. The "Word" was the scripture lesson for the weekend. The "Felt

Need” was the need in people’s lives to which this would speak. One of the weeks I was there the “Felt Need” was “Life Purpose/Significance.” The “Desired Outcome” was what they wanted to happen as a result of the service; that week the “Desired Outcome” was “Empowering others with the life-force of God.” The “Theme” of the service was used as the title of the message and the worship service, and this weekend the Theme was “Role Models for Life.” Finally the “Metaphor/Look” would guide the graphics for the screen and the print materials to have a common look that tied the service together; for this service the “Metaphor/Look” was “Graduate and Mother Photo.”

The next task was for Kim Miller to decide which songs would be used for the weekend. By this time a number of suggestions had been made and the group (or just Kim Miller and the Band Leader) would make the final decision. Also a layout of the service was produced so that it was clear where all the different elements discussed would be. The group would then break up and continue with their individual tasks. The Media Producer began to work on any video shoots needed, the graphic designer begins work on graphics for the service including what will be considered the “main graphic”<sup>21</sup> which is the graphic used multiple times on the screen and on the print materials. This usually includes the Theme phrase as well. The band leader starts rehearsals with the music chosen and may need to call in other musicians depending on the selections.

### ***Micro Team Meeting***

Between the meetings Kim Miller worked with each member of the group. She considers her role to be a translator of the lesson Michael Slaughter wants to communicate and they, in turn, work to translate that to the congregation.<sup>22</sup> As Creative Director, Kim Miller dominates the process because the team never regroups as a whole to discuss a change of direction or clarity on the specific elements.

The only other subsequent gathering is a small one which has a very defined purpose. The Micro Team gathers on Friday and includes the Lead Pastor, Senior Media Producer and Graphic Artist. The purpose of this gathering is to hear a more detailed outline of the sermon the Lead Pastor has finished by this time and then determine what

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<sup>21</sup> A term first coined by Jason Moore, Graphic Artist 1997-2000.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Kim Miller, 25 May 2004.

graphic elements will be used to illustrate the sermon. Some graphics have been prepared at this point and those are shown to see if they are acceptable to the Lead Pastor. This is a much briefer meeting than the Design Team meeting and is focused on illustrating the message with graphic elements.

### ***Saturday Run-Through***

The media producers are very busy often very late into Friday night preparing the elements required. They collaborate only rarely, focusing instead on their individual tasks at hand. There are usually one or two videos every weekend that can each take 15-20 hours to produce and last only a few minutes in length. There are 40-50 slides used each week during a service and dozens more which may have been produced but go unused. Each slide contains lyrics to a song, words of a scripture, a picture used in the sermon, or anything else that might be projected for a given service.

On Saturday afternoon, approximately two hours before the service begins, there is a gathering of the media producers, Lead Pastor and Technical Director (who will run the technical crews all weekend) for a Run-Through. For this meeting they gather in an office around a computer and view the slides prepared the day before. Michael Slaughter will let the Technical Director know when slides should be projected on the screen by providing some cues.<sup>23</sup>

Following the Run-Through there is a one hour rehearsal so the musicians can warm up; this is also the chance for the sound and video technical crews to walk through the service.

### ***Saturday Debrief***

After the second Saturday evening service a large group gathers that includes all Design Team members, the Sound Engineer and several technicians, including the Technical Director. The meeting is designed to elicit feedback about any problems that have surfaced. Although much of the discussion is centered on technical or “flow” issues, I did experience one meeting in which Michael Slaughter expressed his feelings

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<sup>23</sup> One of the media producers is also considered a Floor Director for the weekend and is on a headset to provide addition support for the Technical Director to know when to put slides up. This allows for someone who was part of the design process from the beginning to help make decision quickly.

that the sermon did not work well. He opened the door for criticism and several people offered some suggestions for what might work better. The sermon was modified the next day in response to the concerns first raised by Slaughter. The process ends on Wednesday as the Design Team gathers once again to reflect on the service the previous weekend.

### **Worship Services as “Pseudo-Events”**

Daniel Boorstin (1992) argues that following the introduction of the medium of television American society shifted from idea-centric to image-centric. He suggests that the development of “pseudo-events,” highly scripted, staged events, became the norm for organizations, self-depiction to the general public. For example, rather than sending out a press release espousing the virtues of an institution and the commitment it has to the community, an event is planned and the press is invited to witness, and more importantly photograph, the event thus allowing the images to speak for themselves.

The form of worship service that Ginghamburg has constructed is a pseudo-event. Each week a new pseudo-event is constructed and enacted. For example, Michael Slaughter recounts a service designed to teach the power of prayer and the need for all to pray. Rather than expounding on the virtues and benefits of prayer, he stood before the congregation and simply said, “I just don’t feel like praying, I can’t do it.” He then sat down and after a few moments someone stood up and said he could pray, and did. Then another, and another. What the congregation didn’t know is that the first few people knew what was going on and were asked to start the prayers. To the rest of the congregation this seemed like a wonderful spontaneous act, but was actually quite carefully scripted.<sup>24</sup>

Ginghamburg devotes enormous time, talent, and financial resources to producing a pseudo-event, or as they describe it, “an experience,” each week. The experience, a carefully scripted performance, is a multi-sensory immersion constructed to invoke an emotional response. The music sets moods from the quiet reflective moments of prayer to the upbeat music that evokes an ecstatic response from the

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<sup>24</sup> As told to a Doctor of Ministry group from Drew University January 2000.

congregants. Worship itself has shifted from a sacred act that transmits ideals to a pseudo-event that seeks to evoke an emotional response.

### **The Ginghamburg Method**

The key to developing a pseudo-event that invokes an emotional response is careful planning. According to Kim Miller, Creative Director, the success of Ginghamburg is not attributed to any one individual, even Michael Slaughter himself, but a methodology that allows messages and even entire worship services to be created by a group of skilled individuals.<sup>25</sup> So much of the process was dominated by Michael Slaughter and Kim Miller, I wondered what would happen if the two of them were removed from the process. I was offered the ability to study one half of that scenario. The second week I was onsite at Ginghamburg, Michael Slaughter was to be away and a guest, Mike Berry, was to be preacher that weekend. Mike had been a part of the Ginghamburg congregation but was currently serving the Medway United Methodist church, not far from Ginghamburg. The Medway church was “given” to Michael Slaughter to do something with. It was likely to close and the Bishop of the West Ohio Annual Conference is said to have asked Michael Slaughter to do what he could with it. Michael Slaughter put Mike Berry from his congregation in as pastor, an appointment-making function usually reserved to bishops.<sup>26</sup>

This was going to be Mike Berry’s first time preaching to a gathering of this size. He came to the Design Team that included Michael Slaughter, with a full manuscript of a sermon he had prepared. There had been some guidance as to the topic they were asking him to preach on. Within minutes it became apparent that this was not an appropriate message. He told jokes that were horrible and the entire sermon seemed to ramble without a point. Even more disturbing were his motions and elocution of the message. It was haphazard and ill-timed.

Michael Slaughter began to point out the problems with the message and Kim Miller added her concerns. It was a tense moment as Mike Berry became very agitated and disturbed by the criticism. At the beginning of this Design Team session there was a

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Kim Miller, 25 May 2004.

<sup>26</sup> I do not know if Mike Berry has any standing ecclesiastically with the United Methodist church and his Annual Conference. I assumed he was appointed as a Local Pastor and had that basic level of training.

great deal of discussion on the problems with the message the week before. Michael Slaughter confessed that he didn't do well with it the previous week and they discussed some of its problems. This discussion proved vital for their task of reworking Mike Berry's sermon. Michael Slaughter reminded Mike Berry of the Design Team process. He said, "This is the purpose of this team, to save my ass. If we don't get it here, they won't get it out there."<sup>27</sup>

That one statement helped to change the tone of the meeting and the group together worked on a new outline for Berry's sermon. The new outline was nothing like the old and several times Mike Berry suggested his belief that the old outline was the right one to use. Each time group members gave him an emphatic no. The meeting ended with the agreement that Miller would work with Berry on the sermon and they began to do so immediately following the meeting.

The end result was a decent and well-received sermon. For that to happen, a great deal of behind-the-scenes work was done during the week. At the next Design Team meeting Miller reported that she had spent eight hours working on this 20 minute message with him. She credits the methodology for helping Berry produce the message he did.

### **Perpetuating the Methodology**

Slaughter had become well known throughout The United Methodist Church as an innovator who attained the Evangelical dream of taking a handful of individuals and raising a megachurch. What is even more remarkable was that he didn't simply start a new church; he took a small church in a Mainline denomination and transformed it into a megachurch. The vast majority of megachurches were founded as new church starts, and Slaughter's model of transforming an existing church, if it could be replicated, would be valuable not only to the thousands of United Methodist congregations but also to the hundreds of thousands of congregations that exist in the United States.

Michael Slaughter and the congregation discovered early on that the method they used to produce growth in this congregation was a marketable asset. Before they broke ground on the new building and entered the technological realm, they were marketing

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<sup>27</sup> Research Journal, 12 May 2004.

themselves and their success. They accomplished this by holding conferences for other churches to teach them how to succeed like them.

Success is a very important concept in Evangelical Christianity. Evangelical leaders are required to be successful in order to have status, and status is primarily derived from numbers. Numbers of converts, number attending worship, dollars raised, dollars expended on the building of facilities, square footage of new buildings, even the number of parking spaces matters. The greater the numbers, the greater the status of the pastor. But another factor contributes – time. How quickly all this can be accomplished has an inverse relationship to all these numbers. The quicker one grows the people and the dollars, the greater the status of the pastor.

One of the interesting twists to this formula comes from Michael Slaughter. Slaughter had all the positive numbers and achieved them in a relatively short period of time. But Slaughter has often declared that he is insignificant in terms of the growth of the church. He credits the team and the media produced by the technology as the key to the success. The power of this statement, regardless of whether it is true or not, is that anyone can do what they did at Ginghamburg, if they will but come and learn.

The suggestion of this rhetoric is that by perpetuating Ginghamburg methodology, *any* church can be a Ginghamburg. After they built the new building, they continued to hold conferences which quickly expanded from regional teaching conferences to national conferences drawing thousands of church leaders. They named these conferences “Change Conferences” and their basic structure has remained the same since they began in 1996. The conferences are teaching sessions about Ginghamburg Church. Leaders of the various ministries of the church teach about what they are doing and how they do it with the implication that their work can be transplanted.

In addition to these conferences, the staff individually, or sometimes collectively, publish texts describing what they have done and how they have done it. As of 2007, the staff has published over 14 books, not counting the self-published materials the church uses.

They also produce videos and DVDs which are primarily collections of media produced for Ginghamburg worship and then made available to a wider audience

through its website. During my time at Ginghamburg, they were making their first how-to DVD's: one for producing videos and another on creating graphics for worship.

Finally they sell the graphics they produce for worship as graphic packages. Of course, these graphics were made for a particular congregation and particular theme, so a congregation may believe that they are locked into following Ginghamburg's messages if they want to purchase any of these.

### **The Charismatic Leader**

Although Ginghamburg markets the methodology of worship design as the key to their success, it is, in reality, due to the construction of celebrity through the creation of pseudo-events. The cultivation of Mike Berry to preach at Ginghamburg was intended to demonstrate the power of the methodology, but instead it highlighted the value of celebrity. Mike Berry attained celebrity status within the Ginghamburg community as he stood in front of thousands of people and "performed" a tightly scripted sermon that was designed to appeal to the congregation and bore little resemblance to the sermon he had written.

The many hours that Kim Miller spent with Mike Berry to perfect the sermon as well as the hours that she spends with Slaughter reviewing sermons and previous weeks "performances," reflect what Erving Goffman (1963; 1967; 1969; 1974) calls "sign activity." For Goffman there are two kinds of sign activity, "the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off* (Goffman 1969)." The Design Team reviews both sign acts - The verbal, that is the actual words spoken, but also the unspoken actions, movements, videos, graphics, background music, and other visual cues that are at least as significant to the communication of the message than the actual words.



**Figure 13. Michael Slaughter, a Charismatic Leader, Projected on Screen (Fenimore: 2004)**

Intuitively, and intentionally, the Design Team of Ginghamburg is constructing a pseudo-event each week. In developing this pseudo-event they are in turn developing Slaughter into a celebrity (see Figure 13). Slaughter is removed from significant direct interaction with the congregation. His primary connection with the congregation occurs through worship experiences which are highly mediated. This is typical of celebrities, according to Rojek. “The relationship between celebrities and fans is typically mediated through representation” (Rojek 2001). He provides the charismatic leadership but maintains a significant distance from the average congregant. This is due, in part, to the sheer number of congregants who worship at Ginghamburg, but is also a fabricated aura of celebrity bestowed upon Slaughter.

Chris Rojek, in his text *Celebrity* (2001) describes this connection between religious leader and celebrity:

There is much, then, to caution against over-zealous comparisons between celebrity and religion. None the less, Christianity is adopting many of the devices of consumer culture in branding belief and

communicating faith. Thus, religious crusades have been held in Disneyland, with Christian artists performing on stages and Salvationists preaching the gospel message. Email websites have been constructed to promote e-spirituality. Religious belief is being reconfigured to provide meaning and solidarity as responses to the uprooting effect of globalization. Because these responses are communicated through the mass-media, they borrow the style and form of celebrity culture. We need to examine whether there has been a partial or total convergence between celebrity culture and religion (Rojek 2001).

Ginghamsburg and its use of visual media is a place where the convergence between celebrity and religion is found.

### **Description of a Worship Service**

Worship services are multi-sensory experiences which words cannot fully capture. What follows is a description of the 5pm worship service on Saturday, May 8, 2004, Mother's Day weekend.

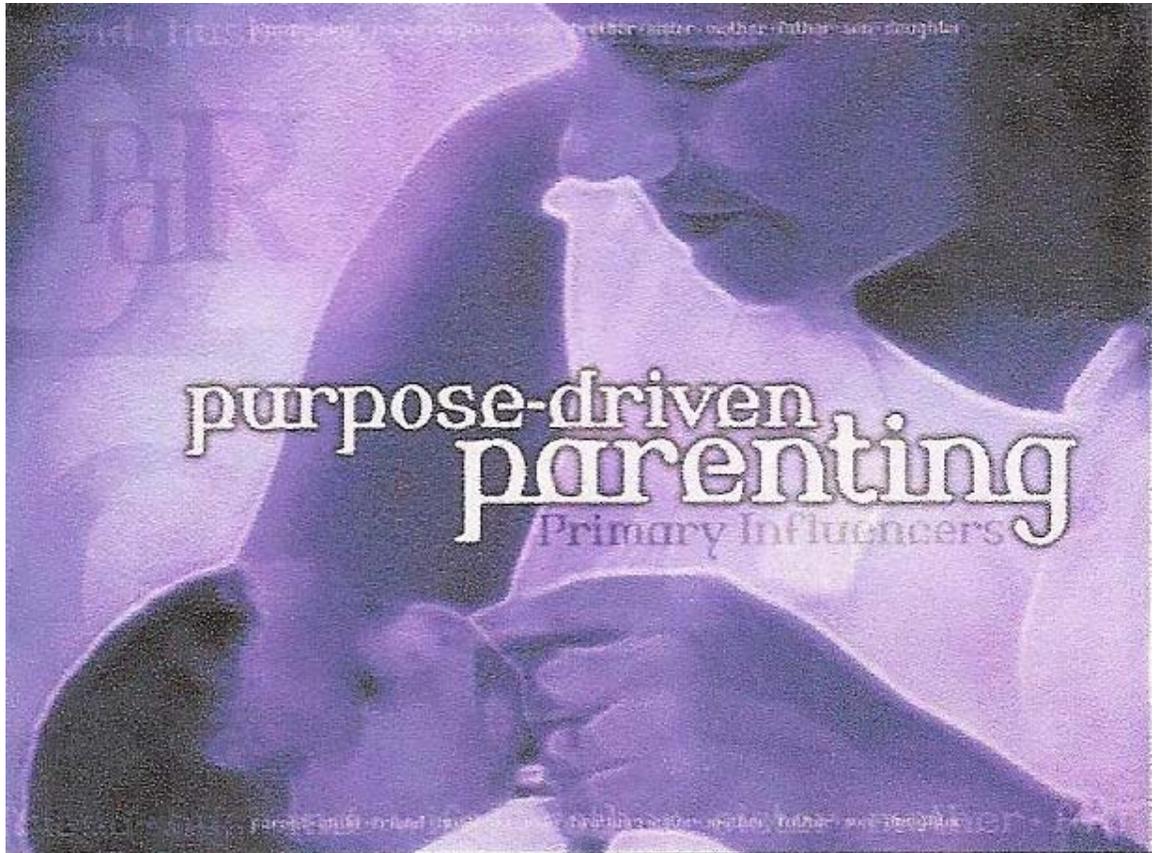
I arrived for the service just as the music rehearsal was ending. The sanctuary was empty and I found a seat in the middle balcony so that I could have a good view of both the stage area and the entire congregation.

Contemporary Christian music was playing over the sound system as people entered. The number of people was impressive; more than 600 people would attend this "lowest attended" service of the weekend. As the number of people gathering grew larger, the voices grew, competing with the music on the sound system.

On the screen on the center of the stage (see Figure 12), a display of announcements of Ginghamsburg were rotating in slow succession. These slides described upcoming events at Ginghamsburg. The band began to enter the stage and the Main Graphic entitled "Purpose-Driven Parenting" was projected on the screen (see Figure 14).

A children's musical group, named "kidz on 'da rock," wearing red sweatshirts entered the stage and sang a song entitled "Sing a Song." (see Figure 15). They sang this with the six main singers and the band on stage. It is an upbeat song with simple repetitive lyrics. The kids swayed and clapped rhythmically with the music. As they sang, the cameras film and the video of the children was projected onto the main screen

on the stage. At the end of their performance all the children yelled out “Happy Mother’s Day.” (They performed this song for all five services throughout the weekend.)



**Figure 14. Main Graphic for May 8-9, 2004**

As they exited the stage, the lights went out and the congregation applauded and cheered for the children. The lights remained off and a video began entitled “Kids Remember the Best Things.” The Design Team called this an “On the Playground” video which is similar to its “On the Street” videos in which a person interviews random people on the street.



**Figure 15. kidz on 'da rock performing on Mother's Day Weekend (Fenimore 2004)**

In this video the children were asked about their family traditions and they described what they do as families. The video and the music in the background were whimsical. It was lighthearted and the answers that the children provided included: going to Friendly's after church, going on trips and summer water fights. The music changed and became more serious or dramatic and although there wasn't a new question voiced, the answers seemed to focus on what their parents do to teach them about God. Some of the answers included: they take me to church each week so I can go to church school, when I go to bed she prays with me and takes me to the kids on 'da rock club. The video ends with a child saying, "God loves us," the interviewer asking, "Where did you learn that?" and the child responding, "My dad!"

As the lights came back up Kim Miller was standing in the center of the stage and began the Call to Worship. She described in a compassionate voice how difficult it is to be a parent and how important that role is today. On the screen the main graphic

returned and she described the theme of that day's service - Purpose-Driven Parenting. She invited people to stand and join together in signing.

The band began to play and the words of the songs were projected onto the screen. Although this is usually a twenty-minute portion of the service, this week it was only nine minutes. The songs were all contemporary Christian songs which, common to Evangelical churches, often choruses which have only a few words and are repeated multiple times.

As the music ended RaNae Street, Children's Ministry Director, stood on the stage and introduced the Infant Baptism/Dedication<sup>28</sup> portion of the service. She asked the parents who have brought their children forward to answer the following questions:

1. As followers of Christ are you directed by the Bible as God's word for your lives?
2. Have you claimed Jesus as Lord of your own life?
3. Will you raise your child in a home that places your child in the arms of Christ and of godly community so that when they are old enough they can proclaim Jesus as Lord of their own lives?

After these questions were answered a soloist began to sing and the screen featured pictures of the children who were being dedicated/baptized along with their names. At this service more than twenty children are baptized or dedicated. On the floor level, near the stage, the parents gathered with their children and five pastors began performing the dedications/baptisms. This moment between pastors and families was recorded by video cameras and projected onto the screen. A couple who were members of the church ended the dedication/baptism time by sharing some words of encouragement for the families and then offering a prayer.

Kim Miller returned to the stage and offered a welcome to all those who were attending the service. She asked for those members of the extended families of the

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<sup>28</sup> Infant dedication is used in churches that require baptism to be reserved for those that can consent to it. Infants are dedicated not baptized because of strict doctrinal understandings of the sacrament of baptism. Ginghamburg provides in this service two diametrically opposed practices and simply offers people to choose what they would like.

dedicated/baptized children to stand and be recognized. She then outlined the church's month long series, Purpose Drive Relationships, and how the day's theme fit with the series. She described the upcoming events, including photographs in the tent outside as well as a bake sale. As each event was described a slide is projected on the screen with the details. She explained that before the collecting the offering there would be special moment for "moms."

On the screen a video began which was entitled "To my mommy..." The voice speaking was that of a young boy and the photographs were of two children and their mother. This collection of photographs follows the narration of the young boy who was thanking his mother for all that she has done. It is a touching, heartwarming piece.<sup>29</sup>

The offering began as a song by the band was performed. The song is "Song for Mama" by Boyz II Men, not a typical church anthem. The performance was well done by these volunteer musicians.

After the song Michael Slaughter entered the stage and began his message. His 30 minute sermon is a typical sermon that could be experienced in almost any church, whether Mainline or Evangelical. He used only a few visuals, pictures that illustrated what he was talking about. Much of the sermon focused on his son and the conclusion of his college baseball career that had ended recently. There are pictures of his son playing the game, his family cheering him on, and a quote from his son that was in a local newspaper.

At the end of the sermon Michael Slaughter led the congregation in prayer and then music began to play indicating the end of the service. Congregants arose and exited the sanctuary as there were people already waiting to come to the next service, which began 30 minutes later.

## **Conclusions**

Ginghamsburg Church may not be the first church to develop a media ministry but it is an excellent example of an Evangelical church which has done so. It represents a typical Evangelical megachurch rooted in a Mainline denomination. Its story is well

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<sup>29</sup> This was a video produced by Todd Carter for his wife on Christmas. He had his son narrate the story. Many of the staff of the Design Team had seen this and thought it would be a great piece for the whole congregation even though it was produced as a personal video for his family.

known throughout Protestant Christianity: A struggling Mainline church that, through the use of technology and media ministry, was transformed into a thriving megachurch. This is the dream of so many struggling churches.

The construction of a highly scripted worship service that provides a worship experience for all who attend is an example of a pseudo-event (Boorstin 1992). For Durkheim (1995), the worship experience at Ginghamburg is an example of “collective effervescence.” The collective effervescence is an excitement, and energetic, ecstatic event that produces an awe-filled response. The use of technologically-mediated visuals creates what Nye (1994) describes as the “technological sublime.”

The rise of Ginghamburg, and churches like it, reflect the decline of organized religion and the need to connect with secular culture. Ginghamburg’s use of metaphors and the media of popular culture demonstrates the loss of organized religion’s domination of mythic stories. The stories that define who we are and the ideals that matter to us come from Hollywood and Madison Avenue, not our local church. Neal Gabler (1998) describes this so well:

So long as religion and ideology prevailed, there was little need for other plots. But as both religious and ideological dogma withered under the onslaught of modern life, the burden of drawing the curtain of fantasy fell to popular culture and especially the movies (Gabler 1998).

As secular culture increasingly dominated the cultural landscape in the U.S., Ginghamburg appropriated dominant cultural language to transmit the Evangelical Christian message. The result was not only the acceptance of the media of the dominant culture, but also an adoption of celebrity culture.

Michael Slaughter is the pastor of Ginghamburg but he is also a celebrity both within his church and on wider landscape of Evangelical Christianity. The church has cultivated the mythic qualities of Slaughter and by doing so has enhanced his celebrity status. Unfortunately, that has led to the acceptance of a celebrity culture throughout Ginghamburg as well. Religious and celebrity culture are not the same.

Organized religion remains committed to producing a general view of social and spiritual order. Celebrity culture motivates intense emotions of identification and devotion, but it is basically a fragmented, unstable culture that is unable to sustain an encompassing, grounded view of social and spiritual order (Rojek 2001).

Slaughter's celebrity status has in the short run provided the ability to grow his followers numerically. But the instability of social organization built around a celebrity may mean difficulty for sustaining social order (Twitchell 2007).

The future of churches like Ginghamburg is unknown. But if the image overshadows the ideals we might heed the warning offered by Boorstin:

The threat of nothingness is the danger of replacing American dreams by American illusions. Of replacing the ideals by the images, the aspiration by the mold. We risk being the first people in the history to have been able to make their illusions so vivid, so pervasive, so "realistic" that they can live in them (Boorstin 1992).

## Chapter 3

### *The Promise Keepers: Purveyor of Evangelical Media Ministry*

The Promise Keepers, a parachurch Evangelical organization, was one of the first to adopt digital display technologies in its events. In the early 1990s Promise Keepers projected song lyrics on large screens so that the men at the events could easily sing along with the music performed by the band. PowerPoint was the presentation software of choice but soon the limitations of this software became evident. Several of the technologists at Promise Keepers left to form their own company, Grassroots Software and produced Prologue, a custom-designed alternative to PowerPoint to work in worship settings. Another company was formed in conjunction with Grassroots Software to operate the technical equipment used at Promise Keepers events. This company, Fresh Air Media, again made up of former Promise Keepers technologists, used Grassroots software at the Promise Keepers conferences. In addition to music lyrics and IMAG (Image Magnification), Fresh Air Media used videos to introduce themes and reinforce the speakers' messages.

In early January 2003 as I drove through the upstate New York community I served as a pastor, a billboard caught my attention. It was a simple sign with two words that stood out from the rest: "The Challenge." The sign was for the upcoming Promise Keepers conference to be held in Albany, New York in June. I knew very little about this organization other than it was an Evangelical Christian men's movement that I had little interest in either as a man or as a Christian. My interest it was as a social scientist studying the use of multimedia technologies in Christian worship.

I attended the Promise Keepers conference that summer and another in 2004. For the 2003 conference I volunteered through their website to be a "media assistant." The volunteer description was very brief and led me to believe that I would work with the technical crew producing the video portion of the conference. I was invited to attend several of the planning sessions for the conference and it wasn't until the final session that the volunteer coordinator disclosed that the "media assistant" position was actually a position created to help the reporters and other media representatives during the event. I declined this position and simply attended the conference as a participant. As a result of this mix-up I was put in contact with the Promise Keepers staff person in charge of

Information Technologies. He offered to provide me a “backstage” tour of the media equipment and setup. This tour provided me with a behind-the-scenes view of the Promise Keepers conference. I also purchased DVDs and CDs of previous conferences, and paid to “virtually attend” the 2003 Promise Keepers Conference in Peoria, IL via a webcast of the event. All of these materials, including the events I attended in person, were “read” through discourse analysis. In this chapter I provide an analysis of the structure of the conference and show how the organization of the conference in terms of setting, order of events, technological presence and media elements (including discourse) reify the ideological discourse of the conferences and are therefore essential to an analysis of this phenomenon.



**Figure 16. The Promise Keepers main stage in Albany, NY (Fenimore 2004)**

## **History and Development of the Promise Keepers**

To begin this exploration I must first recite the origin story of this organization as it is told and retold to its followers. This well-rehearsed story begins with an account of a car ride on March 20, 1990. Bill McCartney, the head football coach at the University of Colorado, was riding with Dave Wardell, an assistant professor of Physical Education, as they were driving together to attend a Christian Athletes banquet in Pueblo. At some point during the three-hour drive McCartney asked Wardell, “If money were not an issue and you could do anything you wanted in your life, what would it be?” Wardell responded that he would work at developing a men’s ministry. McCartney, it is said, was shocked because he too dreamed of starting a men’s ministry. In 1990, these two men gathered 70 men to form a core group to pray and fast in preparation for holding a men’s gathering. McCartney dreamed of filling the University of Colorado’s stadium for just such a purpose (Abraham 1997).

In 1991 the first Promise Keepers conference was held, and 4,200 men attended, far short of the 50,000 needed to fill the stadium. Each of the men attending this event was encouraged to bring 12 more men the following year (enough to fill the stadium). In 1992 the attendance grew but was still short of the goal. In 1993, McCartney realized his vision. 50,000 men attended the event, after just three short years. In 1994 plans were made to expand the conferences and hold them in other stadiums across the country and each year since Promise Keepers has held conferences throughout the country, it reached its peak in 1996 with 22 conferences, attended by an estimated 1.1 million men (Promise Keepers 2004).

On October 4, 1997 the Promise Keepers led an event titled *Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men on the National Mall in Washington D.C.* where, according to their estimates, more than a million men<sup>30</sup> gathered together in witness to their faith. Almost two years to the date after Louis Farrakhan’s Million Man March, this event was the pinnacle of the success of the previously obscure Promise Keepers organization

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<sup>30</sup> Estimates for this gathering widely vary. The Promise Keepers goal was a million men and they believe that they achieved that. No other sources seem to agree with that number, but do agree that the turn out was significantly large. In planning sessions for the Albany 2003 conference Promise Keeper staff made disparaging remarks about the Million Man March and how exaggerated their numbers were. All of this points to the importance in evangelical culture to numbers. The greater the number of people who turn out the better the event. Larger churches indicate better pastors.

(Ribuffo 1998). Although the Promise Keepers were well known in the Evangelical churches, this event gave them national exposure to a wider audience.

In 1998 it was decided to eliminate an admission fee to the events. This resulted in a severe cash-flow crisis resulting in layoffs of almost the entire staff. Within two weeks the staff was rehired after a plea for contributions resulted in the receipt of \$4 million from both individuals and congregations (Kennedy 1998).

In 2003 Bill McCartney resigned as president and CEO of Promise Keepers to care for his wife Lyndi who was suffering from a severe respiratory illness. He was replaced by Tom Fortson, an African-American who was the Executive Vice President of administration and operations.

This “authorized” history needs to be augmented with some additional historical and theological details that place Promise Keepers in context. Over the past century U.S. Christian churches have overwhelmingly been comprised of women (Rosen 2005). The absence of men from the pews is anything but novel. Men who have until very recently held a near monopoly on church leadership, especially the role of pastor/priest, have at certain times sought to change the male-female ratio to their favor. Lippy (1997) connects the rise of the Promise Keepers with the rise of a similar organization, “Men and Religion Forward,” during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both of these organizations arose out of cultural context in which gender roles were changing.

The Men and Religion Forward Movement (1911-12) held rallies in Carnegie Hall to encourage men to return to religion. In an effort to reach men they advertised in local newspapers, targeting their advertisements to the sports section of the newspaper (Balmer 2000). Billboards on Times Square announced the Revival rallies for all to see (Smith 1987).

At about the same time Billy Sunday, a former Chicago White Stockings baseball player-turned-evangelist, was preaching to men to give their lives to Jesus. His preaching style that was far from conventional; Sunday used the language of baseball to reach out and connect with men who had disconnected with the church. His unorthodox methods angered some as he “spiced up his sermons with slangy expressions; threw chairs at the devil and stomped on liquor” (Bendroth 2001).

These men's spirituality movements have been given the label "muscular Christianity." The phrase arose from a now famous review of Charles Kingsley's novel, *Two Years Ago* (1857) published in Britain. A pejorative term at first, it has now become associated with masculine expressions of piety (Balmer 2000).

Two movements arose in response to changing gender norms. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women found political and religious voice in the rise of the Temperance Movement, with which Women's Suffrage is inextricably linked. Religion was at the heart of both of these movements. Many men felt threatened by newly acquired political power of women. Billy Sunday and the Men and Religion Forward Movement are examples of reactionaries who sought to regain the male status that was quickly fading away.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century American men began to leave the churches in large numbers. Women who were relegated to sitting in the pews for centuries were gaining power and control. Varda Burstyn in her text *The Rites of Men* (1999) writes:

With women gaining ground in the church, and with the clergy associated with them stigmatized thereby, the majority of men left Protestantism behind as a primary source of interest and power and moved to other spiritual institutions that could address their different needs. The religious institutions that could respond to these economic as well as psychological needs were the fraternal lodges and the sports associations – both fundamentally religious in their intent and ritual (Burstyn 1999).

Men found in these organizations a way to continue to express masculinity on their own terms because these arenas were exclusively male. These arenas became increasingly important as society as a whole changed in its views of gender.

Following the Second Wave feminist movement of the 1970s, overt sexist statements are rarely publicly espoused. This does not mean that sexism and patriarchy are relegated to the past, however. Clearly we are not an egalitarian society, but "political correctness" has forced the rhetoric of patriarchy to be reframed and rephrased in terms that are less obviously misogynic.

The effects of feminism and specifically the "political correctness" movement in America on the social consciousness has resulted in many men feeling marginalized. These men have had a difficult time adjusting to the changing gender norms and feel

threatened as they rely on the traditional role of husband as sole provider (Deardorff 2000). These men who have felt emasculated by the Second Wave of feminism have sought some meaningful way to regain their lost power.

The mythopoetic men's movement inspired by the writings of Joseph Campbell and led by Robert Bly<sup>31</sup> author of *Iron John* (1990) is one example of the male struggle to redefine masculinity (Claussen 2000). Its popularity and rapid success exemplified by the number of similar books subsequently published illustrates the hungering of many American men to understand what it means to be a man. The unfortunate consequence of the adjustment of many men to the reality of dual-income households and shared domestic responsibilities has been confusion over what constitutes being a man. Deardorff (2000) describes this confusion in reference to the Promise Keepers:

Sadly, men have never had any definition of what it means to be a man. Instead, they have accepted the vague notion that a man is someone who does the opposite of what a woman might do. A man could, for instance, display manliness by performing well as a sports star, military hero, sexual athlete, intellectual, adventurer, power broker, or in other roles that featured male achievement in a realm from which females were either excluded or allowed to function only as objects or as moral support (Deardorff 2000).

One of those roles used to be leadership in the church. Christian clergy were almost exclusively male until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the past two decades many denominations have had a rapid rise in the number of female clergy in churches. According to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) 31% of all students in degree programs "oriented toward ministerial leadership" in the United States in 2006 were women.<sup>32</sup> The Christian church as a whole is in the midst of a major transformation as women are gaining major strides in church leadership. Unfortunately this is not welcomed by all.

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<sup>31</sup> In addition to Bly authors of the mythopoetic movement included: Sam Keen, James Hillman, Michael Meade and Shepherd Bliss.

<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that many of the total 33,287 students who are engaged in study for church leadership are part of denominations or faith communities that do not ordain women. If we were to subtract out the men from those denominations, women would have a much higher than 31% representation in leadership.

Promise Keepers was founded in the midst of this transformation and yet it rejects women as pastoral leaders of congregations. In every statement I have ever read or heard by the Promise Keepers, masculine pronouns are used when referring to clergy. One of the tangible effects of the prevalence of female clergy has been the adoption of inclusive language on one or both of two levels: God language and People language. For those who have adopted the use of inclusive language in worship and sacred texts, the use of inclusive “people language” (i.e. changing “men” to “people”) has been the most widely adopted, yet even theologically liberal churches have had difficulty in replacing male language used to describe God.

The use of inclusive language is extremely troubling to Promise Keepers. A clergy staff member of the Promise Keepers described his problem to me. The pastor at the church he attends does not use masculine language. He saw this as a weakness brought on by the need to “pander to the majority in the church – women.” He said that this use of inclusive language *excludes* men and makes them feel isolated from the church.

Rooted in this argument is the assumption that there is a binary opposition of language, that images, metaphors and even words themselves are either feminine or masculine. In other words, gender neutral language simply does not exist. This binary thinking is an important part of conservative Protestant<sup>33</sup> thought where good/evil, male/female, right/wrong, and saved/unsaved are clearly defined and understood (Harding 1991). Promise Keepers is firmly rooted in this tradition.

### **The Theological & Ideological Origins of the Promise Keepers**

Promise Keepers is supported by many who can be defined as conservative Protestants (Woodberry and Smith 1998). The organization does not align itself with any particular Evangelical association or denomination. In fact, it focuses on the need for a more ecumenical acceptance of all men regardless of their faith tradition. Some of the most conservative Protestants have refused to support them based on their avowed inclusivity, which as previously noted, is only an avowed inclusivity. The worship style

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<sup>33</sup> Conservative Protestants include the three major branches: Fundamentalists, Pentecostals/Charismatics, Evangelicals.

and the choice of speakers for the conferences indicate a much more narrow representation of the spectrum of faith expression.

McCartney and several other leaders of the organization come from the Vineyard churches, a Pentecostal/Charismatic association of churches. The Vineyard church movement began in 1974 by Kenn Gulliksen a former pastor at Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California. Calvary Church was founded by Chuck Smith and “hippie-turned-evangelist” Lonnie Frisbee (Chrasta 2000). The efforts of Smith and Frisbee to reach out to the “hippie” community started what some have labeled the “Jesus Movement.” From this movement sprang the Vineyard churches<sup>34</sup>, an association of churches that includes McCartney’s church, the Boulder Vineyard Church.

Vineyard churches emphasize certain gifts of the Holy Spirit, specifically public healing, speaking in tongues, demon deposal, and prophesy through dreams and visions. The influence of the Vineyard movement on the Promise Keepers is most evident in the adoption of a similar pattern of worship, which emphasizes singing, teaching and prayer. McCartney modeled the Promise Keeper conferences on the Vineyard worship style.

### ***Racial Reconciliation***

As the founder and leader of the Promise Keepers, McCartney has been highly influential in the development of this organization. One cannot fully understand the Promise Keepers without knowing some of the details of Bill McCartney’s life. His story is recounted in numerous texts used by Promise Keepers and his autobiography *From Ashes to Glory* (McCartney and Diles 1995).

In the mid 1980s McCartney attended the funeral of an African-American that he really did not know very well. He was moved to tears at the worship service, having for the first time in his life come to understand, in some measure, the pain and suffering expressed by African-Americans (Allen 2000). McCartney considers this a transformational moment which is why the Sixth Promise (see Appendix B) includes what he calls “racial reconciliation.”

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<sup>34</sup> For a much more detailed account of this see Michael J. Chrasta’s chapter in *The Promise Keepers: Essays on Masculinity and Christianity* edited by Dane Claussen. This chapter provides an overview of the religious history of McCartney and the Promise Keepers in general.

In terms of conservative Protestantism, McCartney's call for racial reconciliation is quite exceptional. Conservative Protestants have done little to change what Martin Luther King, Jr. called "the most segregated hour of the week (referring to Sunday morning worship)."<sup>35</sup> McCartney has publicly stated that he has had a vision in which God told him that if there isn't an adequate African-American representation at the conferences than "he" (God) would not be present either. What could be wrong with a position like that? Michael Kimmel (1997), professor of sociology at SUNY Stony Brook, provides an insightful critique to the carefully constructed Promise Keeper position on racial reconciliation:

Theirs is not a call to support those programs that would uplift the race and set the nation on a course of racial equality. This is not about anti-discrimination legislation or affirmative action – heck it's not even about integration. It's about being kinder and more civil. It's about hearing their pain, not supporting its alleviation. It's about choosing to be nicer, but not about policies that force us to be fairer. In the PK world view, racial reconciliation is an individual posture, but not a collective struggle (Kimmel 1997).

McCartney has not actively been involved in any group or organization seeking to eradicate racism. He has a personal interest in racial reconciliation as he has two grandchildren who were fathered by men of color. In 1989, McCartney's teenage daughter gave birth to a child fathered by his team's star quarterback. McCartney saw this as a wake up call. He described himself as a "workaholic absentee husband" and father (Kimmel 1997). Within the following year McCartney left the Roman Catholic Church and joined the Protestant Vineyard Christian Fellowship. And it was at this time McCartney and Wardell took their now-famous car ride named as the origin of the Promise Keepers.

During those first formative years of Promise Keepers, McCartney continued to serve as head coach at the University of Colorado. This dual role took its toll as McCartney realized that seeking to form a national men's spirituality movement and coach a college football team was not the solution to being more involved with his family. Another formative moment came in 1994 after his daughter gave birth to

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<sup>35</sup> Often attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr. unknown source.

another child fathered by a different black member of his football team. McCartney resigned from his \$300,000 a year coaching job to devote time to his family and the Promise Keepers (Kimmel 1997).

McCartney, in telling this story, infers that his absence was responsible for the conception of his daughter's illegitimate children. This rhetorical move is an important one for understanding the way the Promise Keepers reframe discourse. The emphasis on confessional personal testimony is an important part of conservative Protestant culture. McCartney, in this discourse, is confessing that he has failed at being a good father. His emphasis on the confession detracts from the inverse of the discourse that infers that his presence would have altered his daughter's behavior.

### ***Gender Relations***

McCartney has made it clear that Promise Keepers is not a political organization and does not take political positions. However McCartney himself has become involved in Colorado and national politics. He was criticized for using his publicly funded position as head coach of the University of Colorado's football team, to support a conservative Christian position. He publicly proclaimed homosexuality as "an abomination against God," and allowed his name to be used in a campaign to support a state ballot question that denied equal rights to homosexuals (Quicke and Robinson 2000). McCartney has also been vocal in Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group.

Numerous social problems are traced to the absence of fathers by the Promise Keepers. They see a problem of epidemic proportion in our nation in the physical, emotional and, most importantly, spiritual absence of fathers. According to Promise Keepers, men need to regain their position in the family, their natural birthright as head of the family (1997). This misogynic message is phrased in a more rhetorically palpable form. One of the most quoted excerpts comes from Tony Brown's chapter in the widely best-selling book *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (1994) he writes:

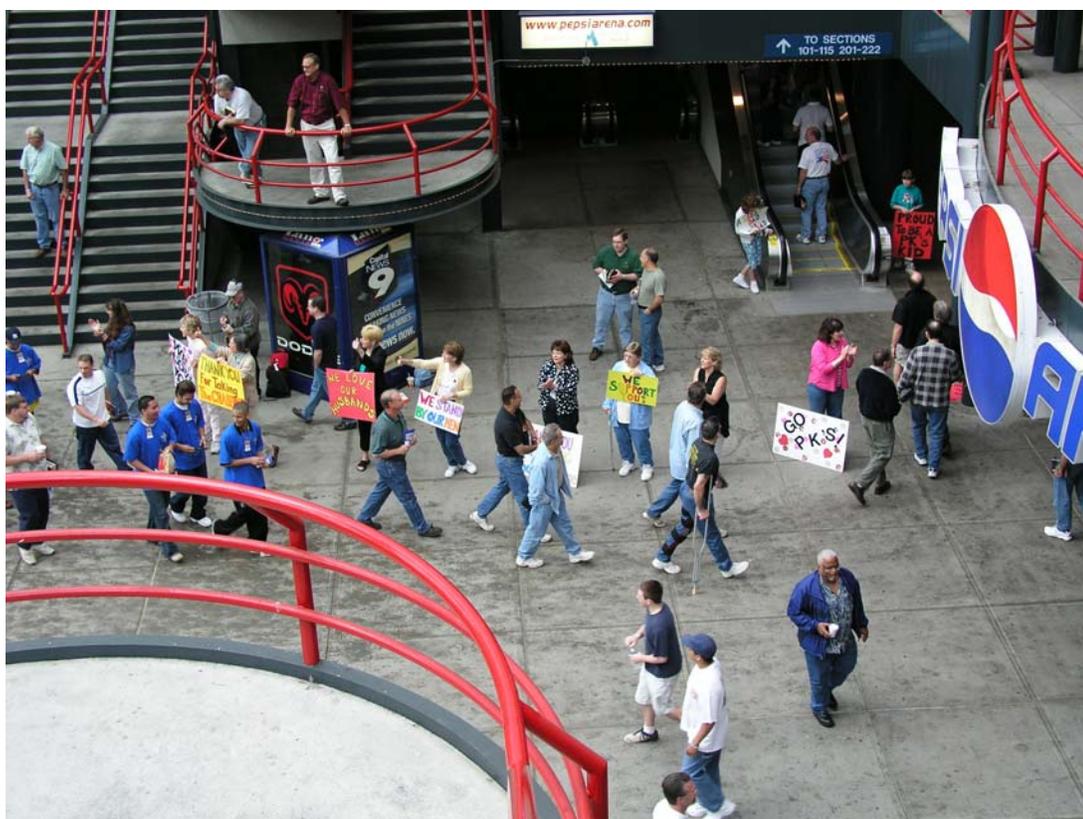
Sit down with your wife and say: 'Honey I've made a terrible mistake. I've given you my role. I gave up leading this family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim that role. Don't misunderstand what I am saying here. I'm not suggesting that you ask for your role back, I'm urging you to take it back (Brown 1997).

Rhetorically this assumes that there is a natural order that has been established by God and that violating it is a sin. With this in mind it is clear that any woman would gladly yield back to her husband this leadership role, for they both want to do what is right.<sup>36</sup> So the act of a man regaining his natural, God-given role as head of the family is one that causes for rejoicing by all in the family, for it is a return to the path of righteousness. Kimmel (1997) calls this a “kinder, gentler patriarchy.” There is little difference between this “kinder, gentler patriarchy” and good old-fashioned patriarchy.

According to other planners of the event one of the unique parts of the 2003 Albany conference was the presence of cheering women, from some local churches, at the entrance to the arena. As the men arrived scores of women cheered for them while holding handmade signs with words of support, like cheerleaders cheering for a football team (see Figure 17). This demonstration was a counter-demonstration to a protest by the National Organization of Women. One of the organizers of the Albany conference had a contact at city hall in Albany and learned that NOW had applied for a permit to demonstrate during that weekend. It was knowledge of this that led a wife of one of the pastors organizing the conference to develop this counter-demonstration dramatically illustrating that women do want their husbands to attend this conference.

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<sup>36</sup> As for joint leadership in a family by both the husband and the wife, it cannot exist, according to several of the speakers at the conferences I attended. They made it clear that in the end someone has to have authority to say yes or no in conflicted decision, and that is the one with the role of head of the family.



**Figure 17. Women cheering as men enter the Promise Keepers conference in Albany (Fenimore 2003)**

### **The Opening Experience: A symbolic analysis**

As I entered the Pepsi Arena in Albany, NY on June 20, 2003, thousands of men were already in the arena. At first I was impressed by the sheer size of the arena. It was my first time in this place and its proportions were awe inspiring. The visual impression was soon enhanced by the cacophony that reached my ears. Hundreds of men were chanting, “We love Jesus, yes we do. We love Jesus how about you?” and after which they would point to another portion of the arena to encourage others to respond. This chant was “passed” throughout the arena in this way for nearly an hour. This was remarkably similar to crowds passing the “wave” at athletic events.

At 6pm the opening band took the stage and the entire space was transformed into a Christian rock concert (see Figure 18). Lighting effects dazzled the eyes as large screens projected the song lyrics while simultaneously projecting close-ups of the band members. Men in the audience were dancing in the aisles and singing along with the

band as they played familiar praise music that is sung in many Evangelical Christian churches.



**Figure 18. Lighting and Sound effects at the Albany conference similar to a rock concert (Fenimore 2004)**

As the band ended its set and men took their seats, a hush fell over the crowd as the lights dimmed and a spotlight illuminated someone in the rear of the arena. Music began to play and Joe White (a popular figure in the Promise Keepers organization) jogged forward to the music from *Rocky*. He was dressed in boxing gear, including a championship belt and a boxer's robe with the words "The Challenge" on the back. As

he approached the stage he stopped at a punching bag and rhythmically punched it. The crowd cheered this aging former football quarterback as he displayed his skill. He took off the robe and belt and put on a black headband and began fashioning a cross out of two large rough hewn beams of wood, groaning as he hammered long nails into the beams. It became clear he was dramatizing the crucifixion of Christ as he started a dramatic monologue in the voice of the unrepentant sinner who was crucified alongside Christ. The man blamed his father for neglecting him. White spoke a mixture of scripture and his own version of what happened in words and phrases that were scripture-like. Next he put on a white headband and spoke as the other man crucified with Christ, the repentant sinner who sought Christ's forgiveness. Finally he put a crown of thorns (see Figure 19) dipped in red liquid so that when he put it on his head you could see (thanks to close ups projected on the large screens) what looked like blood dripping down his face. As he played the role of Christ he used an axe to chop out a portion of the beam, his muscles were bulging, as he chopped the wood. The scene ended with a soloist singing "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"



**Figure 19. Joe White during his opening dramatic monologue (source: promisekeepers.org)**

This dramatic monologue offers an example of how the Promise Keepers mix contemporary American symbols of masculinity with Christian symbols. Anthropologist James W. Fernandez (1964; 1965; 1974; 1982; 1986), who studied the integration of diverse symbols into the ritual of an African cult states that:

It is well accepted that a common system of symbols interpreted in a common way is a prime requisite for an integrated social system. It may be said that confidence in the appropriateness of one's own behavior, and security in the interpretation of other's behavior is obtained, in part, according to the symbols which accompany that behavior (Fernandez 1965).

With this in mind I want to return to Joe White's monologue and analyze the common visual symbols, followed by an analysis of a portion of the words spoken, to reveal the common symbols.

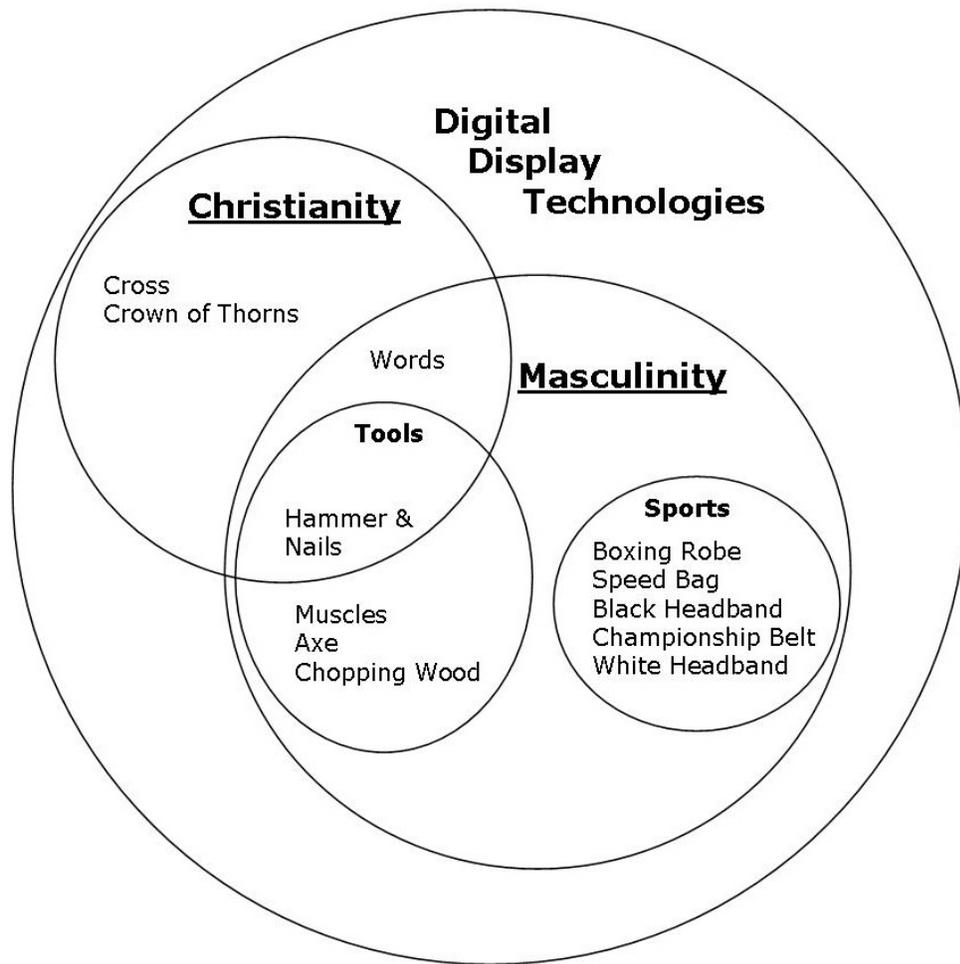
The following is a list of the visual symbols in the order that they appeared:

- A boxing robe with the words "The Challenge" on the back
- A Championship Belt

- A Speed bag – used for training boxers
- A Hammer
- Very Long Nails
- A Black headband
- A Cross
- A White headband
- Muscles
- A Crown of Thorns
- Blood
- An Axe
- Wood chopping

I have coded each of these as symbols of Masculinity and/or Christianity, allowing for multiple coding. In addition, I have added two sub-categories under Sports and Tools. They are represented as intersecting spheres (see Figure 20). Using this visual representation of the symbols from this dramatic monologue, it is clear that the primary visual symbols are masculine.

Using the common symbols of twentieth century American masculinity, Promise Keepers is able to engage audiences by adding a common lexicon of symbols (sport and masculinity) to what might be a less familiar collection of symbols, those primarily Christian in nature.



**Figure 20. Symbolic Analysis of Joe White's dramatic monologue**

Finally, I want examine one particular section of the dramatic monologue, concerning the unrepentant sinner. Of the four canonical gospels of the Christian Bible, only the Gospel of Luke provides any dialogue between Jesus and the unrepentant sinner. The Biblical text reads:

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into

your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”<sup>37</sup>

Comparing that brief dialogue with the more extensive dramatic monologue of Joe White:

- I will never give in.
- I will never ever relent.
- I have always been my own man.
- I didn't need my father's hand to hold and I don't need anybody's hand to hold today.
- I can make it on my own.
- Nothing will take away my independence today.
- I am a self-made man.
- I'll fight you, I'll fight God, I'll fight Rome, I'll fight any man and I might lose, I've lost before and I can take my licks.
- As long as I can stand my ground and maintain control and not give in, I will win.
- Hey up there, if you're the king of the Jews, why don't you come down here and save yourself?

Of these ten sentences only two have specific Christian references (the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup>). The rest might be a description of the archetypical self-made American man who is tough, independent and in control of his life and with the right tools can make or fix things.

Men in the audience are expected to seek to be more like the second character, the repentant sinner. Like the visual symbols, this is accomplished through connecting with the individual using a common lexicon of masculinity, thus encouraging him to consider changing to a new improved form of masculinity.

### **Technology and Space**

The conference is the primary form of communication the Promise Keepers use. The conference is a two-day event involving a number of teaching segments led by pastors or lay church leaders, interspersed with worship, music and even a stand-up

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<sup>37</sup> Luke 23:39-43 in the New Revised Standard Version.

comedy routine. Very few of the speakers<sup>38</sup> are Promise Keepers staff members. Most are affiliated with the organization but have their own churches or ministries.<sup>39</sup>

The conferences are highly structured events designed to not only teach men, but more importantly to provide them with a transformative spiritual “experience.” This experience is heightened by the multimedia technological display.

### ***Fresh Air Media Productions***

Fresh Air Media Productions began in 1980 and is best known as the production company responsible for the Billy Graham crusades held throughout the world and often televised internationally. Greg Flessing, CEO of Fresh Air, agreed to take on the Promise Keepers conferences which at their height were held in 22 stadiums in one year. Each event was videotaped and the entire event was projected on screens throughout the stadium.

The early events in the mid-1990s were produced using Chyron character generators. Chyrons are used by television broadcast companies to overlay graphics over live video. An example of this is in sporting events when the score and other information is produced and updated on the television screen on top of the actual video of the event. (see Figure 21)

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<sup>38</sup> This is also true of the musicians, comedian and others who are leading the program.

<sup>39</sup> This benefits the Promise Keepers in two distinct ways. First, it allows them to distance themselves from any controversial statements made since they are not staff members of Promise Keepers. Second, it builds a network of affiliations which expands the base of support for the organization.



**Figure 21. Chyron Character Generator (source: [www.vidcom.ca](http://www.vidcom.ca))**

The Chyron generators produced high quality graphics to give Promise Keepers events a very professional look. The problem with this technology is its highly linear nature.<sup>40</sup> It was designed for sporting events and tightly scripted live broadcasts where it was known well in advance what would happen next. Each screen is represented by a sequential number. So if the operators know what is happening at each point of a service and what is to come next, the work is relatively easy. What happens in a worship setting such as a Promise Keeper event, however, is that music leaders often change the order of songs or which verse will be sung next, requiring a director to know or look up the number of the screen that is to appear next.<sup>41</sup>

Fresh Air Media Production technicians found that event attendees would make their way to the production booth and ask the technical crew questions about graphics and video production. These technicians knew that if they could produce a software

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Greg Flessing, August 10, 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Lou Douros and Derek Clark, August, 10, 2004.

solution to this problem, they would have a market for it.<sup>42</sup> Over the next year Fresh Air Media Productions developed a “non-linear worship presentation software program,”<sup>43</sup> an alternative to Microsoft’s PowerPoint, a linear presentation software with the same limitations as the Chyron’s. One must move from screen one to screen two unless all the screen numbers have been memorized and can be input rapidly. The program utilized a new feature implemented in Microsoft’s Windows operating system which allowed a computer to have multiple screens.

The software, named Prologue used two screens - one seen only by the operator of the computer and another that displayed the actual output to the screen. It allowed the operator to move easily from verse to verse in a song in a non-linear fashion. The software was tested and perfected by using it at Promise Keepers events and then sold at the events for \$99. The potential market for the product was huge: At the height of the Promise Keepers events over one million men attended, representing tens of thousands of churches.

### ***Grassroots Software & Sunday Plus***

As Fresh Air Media Productions continued to update the software, its name was changed to Sunday Plus.<sup>44</sup> By 2002 there were six or seven staff dedicated to the development, customer support and product design of Sunday Plus; in order to take the next step and new round of investment was necessary. Greg Flessing, CEO of Fresh Air Media, decided it would be better to allow this portion of his company to become independent. In June 2003 this became a reality as Grassroots software was incorporated and Lou Douros named CEO.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Greg Flessing, August 10, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Fresh Air Media worked in collaboration with another company with the intention of developing the product together. Instead the other company formed what is now MediaShout a rival worship presentation software company.

<sup>44</sup> The name was changed to Sunday Plus because the name Sunday was easily recognizable as a church product and the Plus was added to include Seventh Day Adventists who worship on Saturday, as well as the notion that there could be other times during the week the software could be used. The domain name for Prologue was not available but Sunday Plus was, according to Lou Douros.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Greg Flessing, August 10, 2004.

Grassroots focused on smaller churches with an average 100-150 in attendance as its primary market.<sup>46</sup> The company offered the ability to install the software on as many computers as a church would like, recognizing the fact that many different people work to put a service together.<sup>47</sup>

Grassroots continues to use its software at Promise Keepers events, recognizing the significant marketing opportunity. Not only does Grassroots have an audience that actually experiences the use of this software, customers can attest that the software has been tested and perfected at these events.

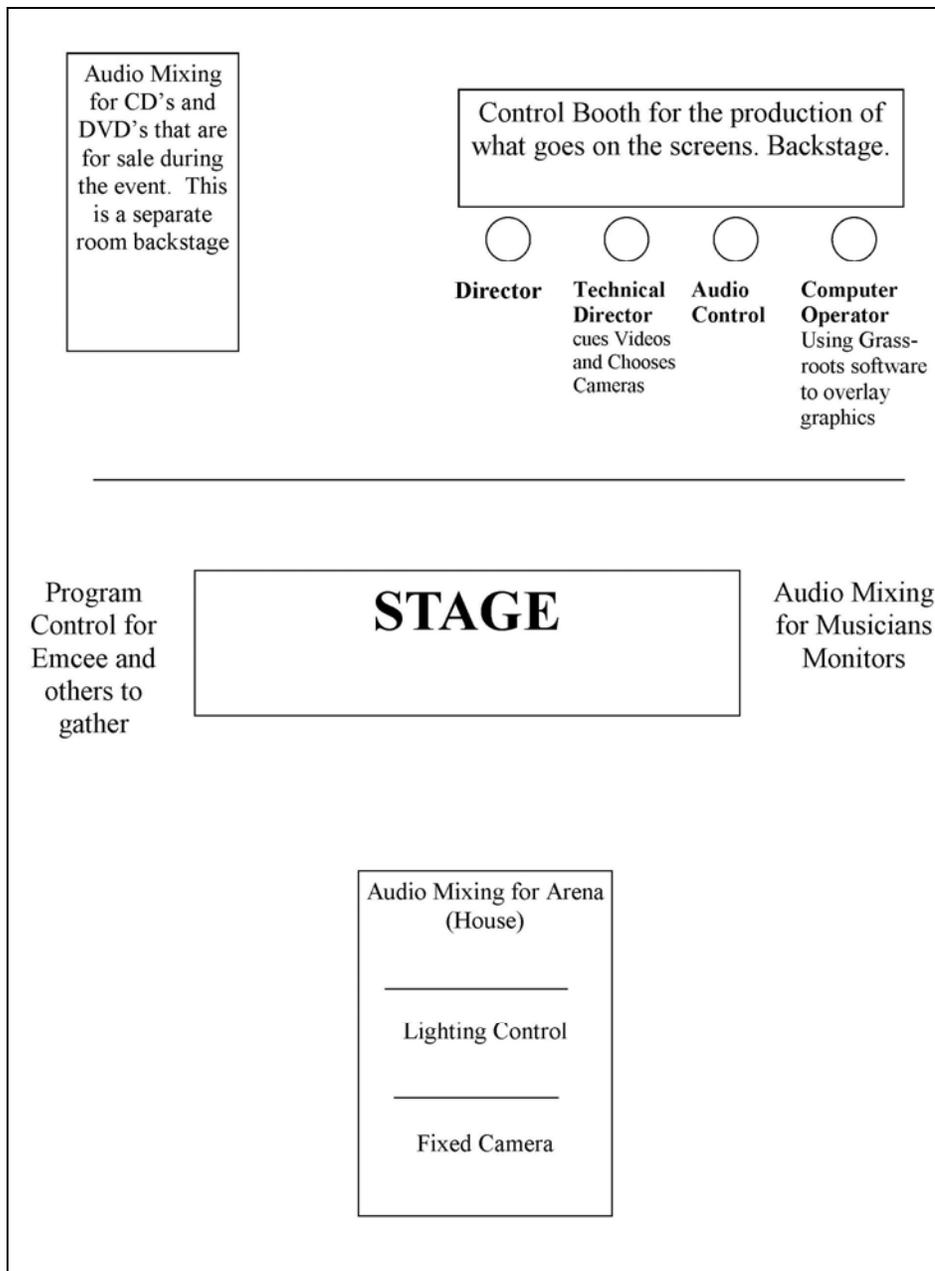
The combination of technology and larger-than-life space creates a feeling of awe. David Nye (1994) describes this same experience when referring to the technological marvels of the past centuries, such as the locomotive or the skyscraper. We can trace this further back to the construction of the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe inspirational in form as well as in ritual (Fenimore 1993).

Awe at a Promise Keepers event is produced through a combination of lighting, sound and video elements to produce an experience in which the observer is immersed in the virtual world created by the technologists. A great deal of planning and equipment goes into these events. A mobile control room is set up behind the stage to control the camera, computer graphics and video portions of the conference. Sound mixing is controlled in three separate locations. Sound mixing for the musician's monitors is done next to the stage. Sound for the CDs and videos sold at each event is separately mixed in a small room in the backstage area, while sound for the audience is mixed in the same location as the lighting controls (see Figure 22).

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<sup>46</sup> The software developed by Lou Douros and his team was not the first non-linear worship presentation software. A rival company Fowler Inc., developed their software Song Show Plus a few years earlier after purchasing a rival to Microsoft's PowerPoint, Bravo. Bravo became the base for the new software that Fowler designed. Fowler's strategy was to market a combination of hardware, software, and educational training on the equipment. They have done a number of large venue church installations. (From interview with Ron English, June 14, 2004)

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Lou Douros and Derek Clark, August 10, 2004.



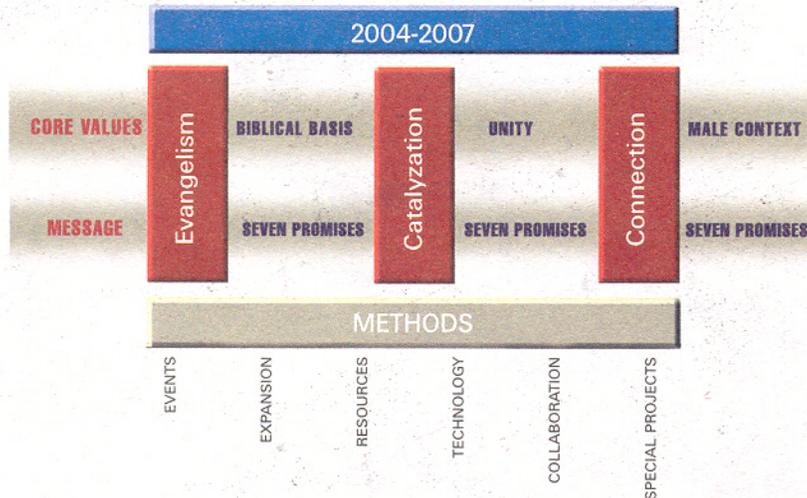
**Figure 22. Schematics of controls**

All of these technical personnel are connected by the headsets they wear. These radio headsets are high quality devices that I was told are loaned each year to the technical crews at the Super Bowl. They were chosen for their superior quality and reliability for communication and coordination are two of the key elements for the success of a Promise Keepers conference.



## Promise Keepers Strategic Plan Movement → Mission

*A Period of Unfinished Business*



As we move into the future we understand that Real Men will make a difference in the world. In a world of counterfeits, Real Men Matter.

<b>A REAL MAN:</b>	
<b>R</b>	Roots his identity in Christ
<b>E</b>	Engages the enemy and knows his position in the spiritual war
<b>A</b>	Admits his flaws and knows his strengths
<b>L</b>	Listens to God's voice and follows his lead
<b>M</b>	Motivates others to follow Christ and commits to authentic brotherhood
<b>A</b>	Accepts his roles and responsibilities
<b>N</b>	Navigates his life on the right priorities

**Figure 23. Definition of Real Man (Source: Promise Keepers).**

The technologically-mediated experience reifies the ideology of the Promise Keepers by immersing the participant in a virtual space constructed by a careful selection of the setting and attention to every detail of the visual and aural components of the weekend. To illustrate more clearly how this is accomplished I will elaborate on one narrative thread that is woven throughout the weekend – the Promise Keepers definition of “a Real Man.”

### **Righteous-Masculinity: The definition of a “Real Man”**

The phrase “a real man is...” was seen in various forms at the conference. Shirts with this phrase were worn by a number of the conference attendees. There was also a page that outlined this in terms of the Promise Keeper strategic plan in the conference booklet handed out as you entered the conference (see Figure 23).

Promise Keepers has an understanding of “real” masculinity shared by the speakers and those organizing the conference. This definition is overtly articulated. Careful analysis of the conference as a whole reveals six additional characteristics associated with the Promise Keepers “real man.” These six characteristics were mentioned and repeated in various forms throughout the sessions and in the Promise Keeper literature and other forms of media sold at the conferences.

### ***“A Real Man is”...a technophile***

The use of technology at Promise Keepers events has been integral to the overall structure of the conferences. The size of the conferences dictates the need for multimedia technologies, simply to allow so many people to view the conference. However, the impressive implementation of these technologies represents the common assumption that men are technophiles. The technology is used to construct an impressive and awe-inspiring setting that is assumed to be specifically of interest to men. The 2004 Albany conference incorporated a stage with large replications of mechanical gears strewn about (see Figure 25). The central design component of the conference stage is a good example of the Promise Keepers’ expectation to appeal to the average man.

***“A Real Man is”...a sports fanatic***

Promise Keepers hold men’s conferences in sports arenas. This type of space is specifically chosen because a sports arena is considered “male space.” As male space it is assumed that men are familiar with and comfortable with this setting. This also makes a major assumption – that men are sports fans (Beal 2000). The sports theme is expressed in numerous forms. Jokes are made throughout the conference referring to local sports teams and national sports figures.<sup>48</sup>

The connection between sport and masculinity is an important one. R.W. Connell (1995) in his foundational text *Masculinities* describes sport as a “masculinizing practice.” Sport, according to Connell, constructs men’s power over women (and gay men). He writes:

The institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women. These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in the bodily performances. Thus men’s greater sporting prowess has become a theme of backlash against feminism. It serves as symbolic proof of men’s superiority and right to rule (Connell 1995).

In *The Rites of Men* (1999) Burstyn points out that not only is sport a means of constructing masculinity, she adds that there is a hierarchy of sports with football dominating the other sports.

North American football...expresses the complex hierarchical relations and interactions of mature masculinist capitalism with its extended complexities in social and gender divisions of labour, and is an example of the prevailing dominant ideology (Burstyn 1999).

***“A Real Man is”...Married with children (or aspiring to this)***

Throughout the conference references were made to “your wife,” or “your kids” reinforcing the understanding that it is normative (as well as Biblically mandated) that men marry and have children. Although conferences are promoted as men’s conferences, much of the discourse focuses on relationships with women and children. By defining family strictly as a man, a woman and children, Promise Keepers’ positions

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<sup>48</sup> As someone with relatively no sports knowledge I found it uncomfortable as others laughed at these jokes and I missed the humor.

on a variety of controversial issues such as same-sex unions, women as heads of households and divorce, are made clear without ever commenting on them.

The importance of a man's role in a family is demonstrated in the introductions of the main speakers at the conferences. In a booming voice the announcer introduces them by their roles in life – “author, teacher, husband, and father.” Family roles were always part of this introduction. These roles were reinforced in the 2004 conferences by using the three small screens that displayed these roles as the speaker was being introduced (see Figure 24).



**Figure 24.** These three screens were used to display words or names for emphasis (Fenimore 2004).

***“A Real Man is”...the head of his household (or in need of recovering this)***

Related to the importance of a man's need to be in a traditional nuclear family is the role a man needs to play in the family: he is to be the head of the household. Phrases like “spiritual head of the family” are used to obscure the underlying patriarchal assumptions. Recent scholarship illuminates the role of Promise Keepers men in families (Gallagher and Smith 1999; Lockhart 2000; Gallagher 2003). Sociologists

Sally Gallagher and Christian Smith (1999) concluded following their in-depth interviews of 265 Evangelicals that:

...there is relatively little in these interviews that challenges contemporary ideals regarding work and family. In terms of transforming contemporary culture for Christ, then, the rhetoric of male headship appears to be a fairly ineffective tool. Nevertheless, Evangelical subcultural rhetoric that combines the symbolic and the practical is successful in obfuscating the tensions inherent in the practice of engaged orthodoxy. The transformation of headship from authority-breadwinner to symbolic head and protector continues to provide an ideological framework within which individual Evangelicals may maintain a sense of distinctiveness from the broader culture of which they are a part (Gallagher and Smith 1999).

One specific illustration of the reinforcement this understanding is reinforced in the Promise Keepers events is the consistent use of male-centered humor. Brad Stine, a stand-up comedian who began his connection with Promise Keepers in 2003, tells numerous jokes focusing on the second creation story and specifically the dominant role of Adam (the first man) in the story. Through humor, men are united in laughter and the Promise Keepers organization can remind critics that it just a comedy routine, not to be taken seriously.

***“A Real Man is”...recovering from a troubled relationship with his father/Father***

A recurring narrative is the assumption that men have had troubled relationships with their fathers; this can be rectified through developing a good relationship with their own sons. There are numerous stories and illustrations throughout the conference teaching men how to be better fathers.

Secondly, there is the relationship a man has with God, the Father. It is assumed that all need to restore their relationship with their “heavenly Father.” This relationship has an inherent hierarchy as well, with God the Father clearly above any earthly father.

This dual use of “father” is well illustrated in the story of “the unrepentant sinner” crucified with Jesus. He describes his troubled relationship with his father that led him to his life of crime. The message is that men’s broken relationships with their earthly fathers can be healed by restoring their relationship with a loving “God the Father.”

***“A Real Man is”...a Christian***

In order to restore this relationship, Promise Keepers actively seeks to counteract what it believes is the popular understanding that Christianity is for “sissies.” The imagery and metaphoric language of the conferences reassure attendees that Christianity is for “real men.” A good example of this comes from the use of the movie *The Passion of the Christ* at the 2004 Albany conference. This movie is especially appealing for the Promise Keepers in that it exemplifies the suffering of Christ to such a great extent that it can only be classified as visual hyperbole. The amazing exaggeration of the suffering of Jesus in this movie portrays him as a tough male figure, bordering on superhuman. This helps Promise Keepers to “de-sissify” the Jesus of many churches; a Jesus it feels is represented as a wimpy pacifist interested in only love and peace. Mel Gibson, who represents “real man”lines in this portrayal of Jesus, also provides acceptable male role models through two other clips used in Promise Keepers conferences *Braveheart* and *We Were Soldiers*.



Figure 25. Replicas of mechanical gears decorate the stage for the 2004 conferences (Fenimore 2004).

***“A Real Man is”...always struggling with lust***

Lust, is characterized as a male problem that dominates and destroys many men. It is described in terms that suggest that it is a powerful force that needs to be resisted and controlled, because it destroys families and is abhorrent to God. This theme flows throughout a Promise Keepers event.

Promise Keepers makes clear that lust is not a God-given part of what it means to be a “real man.” It is also not part of our “nature,” which is God-created. Therefore lust is attributed to Satan who tempts men with “a lust that burns in their hearts.”

Promise Keepers sees this as such a difficult and almost insurmountable problem and suggests the need for a technical solution for this problem. The Promise Keepers organization offers a service to filter “godless material from the internet,” and allow men to be accountable to their wives who can see a history of what their husbands have been

viewing on the Internet. This service, pkFamily.com, is an ISP service designed to help Promise Keepers remain faithful. The website states that it is “a division of the Promise Keepers.”

## Conclusions

So what significance does all of this have? Clearly Promise Keepers is a group rooted in conservative Evangelical theology, providing a reaction to Second Wave feminism. Promise Keepers’ use of common symbols of hegemonic masculinity to connect with men allow them to feel safe as they are provided indoctrination to Promise Keepers’ theological and ideological beliefs.



**Figure 26. Mock-up of the Stage for the 2004 Promise Keeper events**  
(source: [promisekeepers.org](http://promisekeepers.org)).

Through the built space of a technological paradise (see Figure 26), men are provided a setting that is rich in both masculine and technological symbolism. Combined with a rich multimedia experience incorporating lighting, sound, and visual effects, men are immersed in a sensory experience that creates technologically produced awe.

Promise Keepers events are a combination of sacred and secular symbols best understood as a “confused blending” in Mary Douglas’ (1966) terms. Promise Keepers has elevated the ordinary mundane to the sacred. Sport and technology have mediated ideology and theology by their confused blending with the sacred acts and rituals of Evangelical Christianity.

James W. Fernandez (1965) shows that the use of symbols in the ritual of the Bwiti, an African cult, have a unifying effect.

The ritual at once attracts the participants to it by the sheer interest they have in its forms, and exerts this cohesive influence upon them through their participation in these forms of ritual interaction. Yet while there is a rather elaborate symbol system manipulated in this ritual there is resistance towards attempting to establish consensus about the meaning of these symbols. “All participants speak with one voice,” it is said, “and that voice is the voice of the leader.” (Fernandez 1965)

For the Promise Keepers the symbols of the rituals unify men via a common language of sport, technology and family values, with the leaders providing a cohesive definition of “real man,” that defines pious masculinity.

Ginghamsburg Church and the Promise Keepers use common symbols including high-tech entertainment electronics and new media technologies to mediate conservative Christian ideology and theology. In the next chapter we will examine a Mainline church’s use of digital display technologies.

## **Chapter 4**

### *First Church: A Mainline Church using Digital Display Technologies*

We explored in the previous chapters the use of digital display technologies by an Evangelical church and an Evangelical parachurch organization, both of which exemplify the Evangelical churches. This chapter presents a church exemplifying a mainline church. This account does not describe an actual church, but a composite based upon ten of the 70 United Methodist Churches for which I am responsible as District Superintendent. We'll call our subject "First Church."

Twenty-five years ago the church had an attendance of nearly 200, but this has steadily diminished. First Church currently has an average attendance of 75 and a membership of 400. The average age of the membership has risen to 57. There are few family units attending the church.

The pastor of the church is a 52 year old male. I will call him Pastor Joe. He entered ministry after a twenty-five year teaching career. This is his first full-time ministry assignment. During his five years at First Church attendance declined slightly mostly due to the death of longtime members.

First Church has experimented with a number of efforts to increase worship attendance. Two years ago it rented a billboard on the main road into town advertising the church worship service. Members received many compliments about the sign but only two people visited the church while the ad ran and neither came because of the sign.

The church is plagued by financial problems. Each year the budget deficit grows and each year the church is forced to dig deeper into its endowment funds to pay its operating costs. The congregation has determined that if the rate of decline continues consistently they will only be able to provide for a full-time pastor for five more years at most.

#### **Decision to Adopt Digital Display Technologies**

Last year the pastor attended a workshop sponsored by his denomination on "Media Ministry." He purchased a book entitled *Media Ministry Made Easy: A Practical Guide to Visual Communication* by Tim Eason. The workshop and the book encouraged Pastor Joe to invest in a video projector and screen to be used in worship.

Pastor Joe had only minimal computer skills and was unfamiliar with Microsoft PowerPoint. The Church Council (the governing body of the church) suggested he enlist a high school student who attends the church to help him. A student agreed, so each week the pastor would give a copy of the bulletin to her and she would produce PowerPoint slides of the prayers, Bible passages, responsive readings and songs that made up the worship service.

The use of the video projector in worship became a major source of controversy. Elderly parishioners complained they couldn't read the words. They complained that the setup of the projector was unsightly and distracting (see Figure 27). At Church Council meetings parishioners complained that they didn't like it and it was a waste of money. Pastor Joe defended the decision to invest in this equipment and explained that it would take time for parishioners to get used to having this in worship and for those running it to learn how to use it better.

Over the period of a year the operators became more proficient at using the technology. Slides appeared on the screen when needed and font sizes had been adjusted to accommodate those who need larger print. What had not changed was the slide content and the nature of the congregation. A few new people had visited the church over the past year but none had stayed long. The Church Council began to wonder when all the young families who had been promised/hoped for as a result of adopting this new technology would arrive.

### **Worship Planning Process**

Pastor Joe attended another seminar on Media Ministry, this one emphasizing the use of worship planning teams. Pastor Joe had always planned worship himself; it was what he learned in seminary and he enjoyed the creative process of designing a worship service from start to finish. He took pride in the prayers that he wrote for each service, not using the prefabricated prayers provided in worship planning resources that so many other pastors used. The seminar encouraged the pastor to engage a small group from the church to develop the worship and to suggest visuals to enhance the worship service.



**Figure 27. Setup at First Church for Video Projection (source: Fenimore 2004)**

Reluctantly the pastor gathered his lay leader and three other volunteers (all women), including the high school student who developed the slides each week. They decided to meet once a month and plan worship services a month in advance. In preparation for the planning meeting Pastor Joe prepared a sheet with each Sunday's lectionary readings and the title for the sermon he would preach.

They decided to begin with the first week listed. They asked Pastor Joe to share some more information about his sermon. From that information one woman began to suggest some hymns that she thought were relevant to the topic of the sermon. Another woman went into the sanctuary and grabbed hymnals for everyone and they began to look through the hymnals. They had only planned to meet for 1 ½ hours and when that time had elapsed they still had only a list of hymns for the next Sunday. Pastor Joe was more than discouraged. A Worship Planning Team had turned into a hymn selection committee.

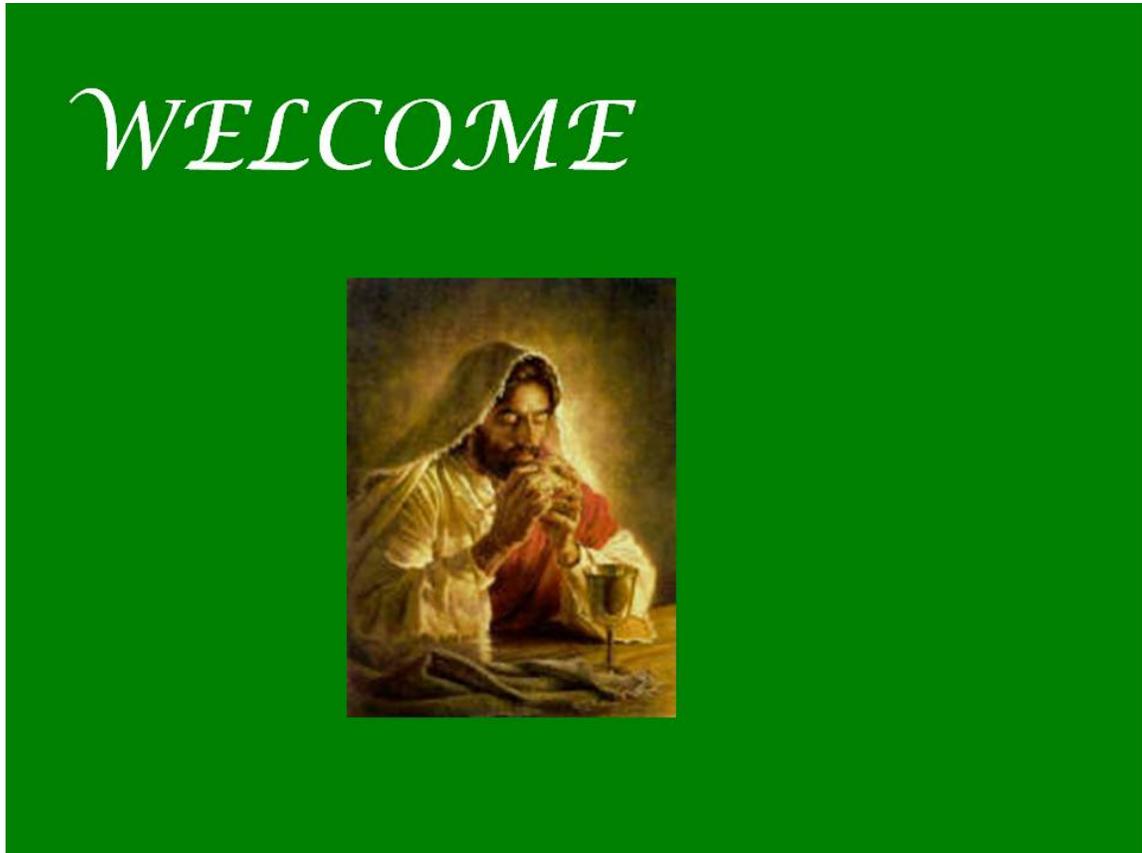
They decided to meet again the next week. This time Pastor Joe was more prepared. He asked the group to skip hymns and to save those for last if there was time. He asked the group to think of images to project on the screens. Again he outlined his sermon for the next week. Before he could finish there were suggestions of pictures that could be used. Pastor Joe told a story about a recent vacation he had taken; they suggested he use some of the pictures he had taken on that vacation. He planned to talk about a particular place in Israel where Jesus spoke before a crowd. Someone suggested finding a picture of that place on the Internet.

Pastor Joe was excited about the energy of the group and how they had helped think of pictures but the group only finished the next week, but it was a start. They decided to meet every other week and they helped each week by suggesting pictures to illustrate the sermon and then picking hymns that would work with the sermon.

### **First Church Worship Service**

A few minutes before 11am people are talking in the sanctuary as organ music is quietly played. By 11am about 70 people are seated in a sanctuary that could easily hold 250 people. The congregation is scattered throughout the sanctuary sitting alone or in small groups, with few sitting near the front. There is a projector on a card table

stretched across a pew in the front (see Figure 27). A pull-down screen is mounted on the front wall of the sanctuary where a Welcome Slide (see Figure 28) is projected with the word “WELCOME” and a small picture of an anglicized Jesus staring at a chalice.



**Figure 28. Welcome Slide from First Church.**

There are two persons standing in the front of the church, Pastor Joe wearing a white robe and a lay woman who is listed in the bulletin as the Lay Reader. As the organ music ends the Lay Reader moves to the lectern, and the slide changes to the words of the Call to Worship (see Figure 30 – Call to Worship 1) which are identical to the words in the bulletin (see Figure 29). On the screen there are pictures that illustrate the words. For example, the phrase “We shall mount up with wings like eagles” is used in the first slide accompanied by the picture of an eagle. The slides move forward throughout the entire Call to Worship. This is followed by the hymn “Great is thy Faithfulness” with the words projected on the screen (not included in Figure 30).

<b>Welcome to First Church!</b>		
<b>October 5, 2008</b>		
<b>Worship</b>	<b>11:00am</b>	
* indicates to stand as you are able; if sitting is better for you, feel free to sit as you worship!		
Greeting and Announcements Prelude – Preparing for Worship <i>There are pads in the pews to let us know that you are here and if you are visiting—please take some time during the service to fill it out and pass it along.</i>		
Call to Worship		
One: Have you not known?		
<b>All: Even young people will faint and be weary and fall exhausted;</b>		
One: Have you not heard?		
<b>All: We shall mount up with wings like eagles.</b>		
One: Has it not been told to you from the beginning?		
<b>All: We shall run and not be weary.</b>		
One: Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?		
<b>All: We shall walk and not faint.</b>		
One: They who wait for the Lord.		
<b>All: We who wait for the Lord.</b>		
<b>*Hymn # 140</b>	Great is Thy Faithfulness	
Children’s Time		
The Lord’s Prayer <i>(p. 895, or see the screen)</i>		
We Offer Ourselves and Our Gifts to God’s Purpose		
The Offertory		
Response: All things come from you, O God.		
<b>All: And of your own have we given you.</b>		
		<b>*Doxology (p. 94, or see the screen)</b>
		<b>*Prayer of Dedication</b>
		<b>Communion Meditation</b>
		Bread is Broken as a token of the Savior who died for me. Now we meet Him, gladly greet Him, for in dying He set us free.
		Come risen Lord and dwell with us. Be ever in our heart. May we know Thine eternal grace. May sin and death depart.
		Wine so sacred, consecrated, given to us from His hand. Life unending, love descending, in His mercy we ever stand.
		Sing his glory, wondrous story, we receive Him with bread and wine.
		Voices raising, humbly praising, we are mortal, but ever Thine.
		<b>Scripture</b> Isaiah 40:21-31
		<b>Gospel</b> Mark 1:29-39
		Communion Homily <i>Pastor Joe</i>
		<b>*Hymn # 618</b> Let Us Break Bread Together
		We Celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion <i>(p.9 or see the screen)</i>
		<i>All are welcome; there are no boundaries of age, membership, or any other kind.</i>
		<i>We will share the Bread and Cup by intinction, dipping the bread into the cup. Please feel free to kneel at the rail for as long as you wish after receiving Communion.</i>
		<b>*Hymn # 664</b> Sent Forth with God’s Blessing
		<b>*Blessing</b>
		Postlude – Preparing for the Week Ahead

**Figure 29. Printed Bulletin of First Church.**

The congregation sits and the screen is blank as Pastor Joe calls forward the children for what the bulletin indicates is “Children’s Time.” Two children, brother and sister, come forward to Pastor Joe. There are no other children in the service. They sit up front on the steps that delineate the chancel area. Pastor Joe sits with them and talks to them about communion. He tells the story of Jesus eating a meal with his disciples just before he was crucified, and tells them that we call this the Last Supper. He describes how we as Christians share this same meal together as we remember the love that Jesus has for us. The kids joined him in the Lord’s Prayer and he told them they could go to “Children’s Church.” The children departed with an adult.

<p><i>WELCOME</i></p> 	<p><i>Have you not known?</i></p> <p><b>Even young people will faint and be weary and fall exhausted;</b></p> <p><i>Have you not heard?</i></p> <p><b>We shall mount up with wings like eagles.</b></p> 
<p>Welcome Slide</p>	<p>Call to Worship 1</p>
<p><i>Has it not been told to you from the beginning?</i></p> <p><b>We shall run and not be weary.</b></p> <p><i>Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?</i></p> <p><b>We shall walk and not faint.</b></p> 	<p><i>They who wait for the Lord.</i></p> <p><b>We who wait for the Lord.</b></p> 
<p>Call to Worship 2</p>	<p>Call to Worship 3</p>
<p><i>All things come from you, O God.</i></p> <p><b>And of Your own have we given You.</b></p> 	<p>Communion Meditation</p> <p>Bread is Broken as a token of the Savior who died for me. Now we meet Him, gladly greet Him, for in dying He set us free.</p> <p>Come risen Lord and dwell with us. Be ever in our heart. May we know Thine eternal grace. May sin and death depart.</p> <p>Wine so sacred, consecrated, given to us from His hand. Life un ending, love descending, in His mercy we ever stand.</p> <p>Sing his glory, wondrous story, we receive Him with bread and wine. Voices raising, humbly praising, we are mortal, but ever Thine.</p>
<p>Offering Prayer</p>	<p>Communion Meditation</p>

Figure 30. Slides of First Church Worship Service.

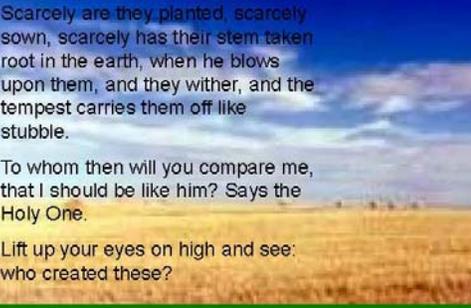
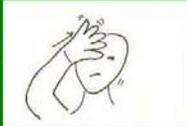
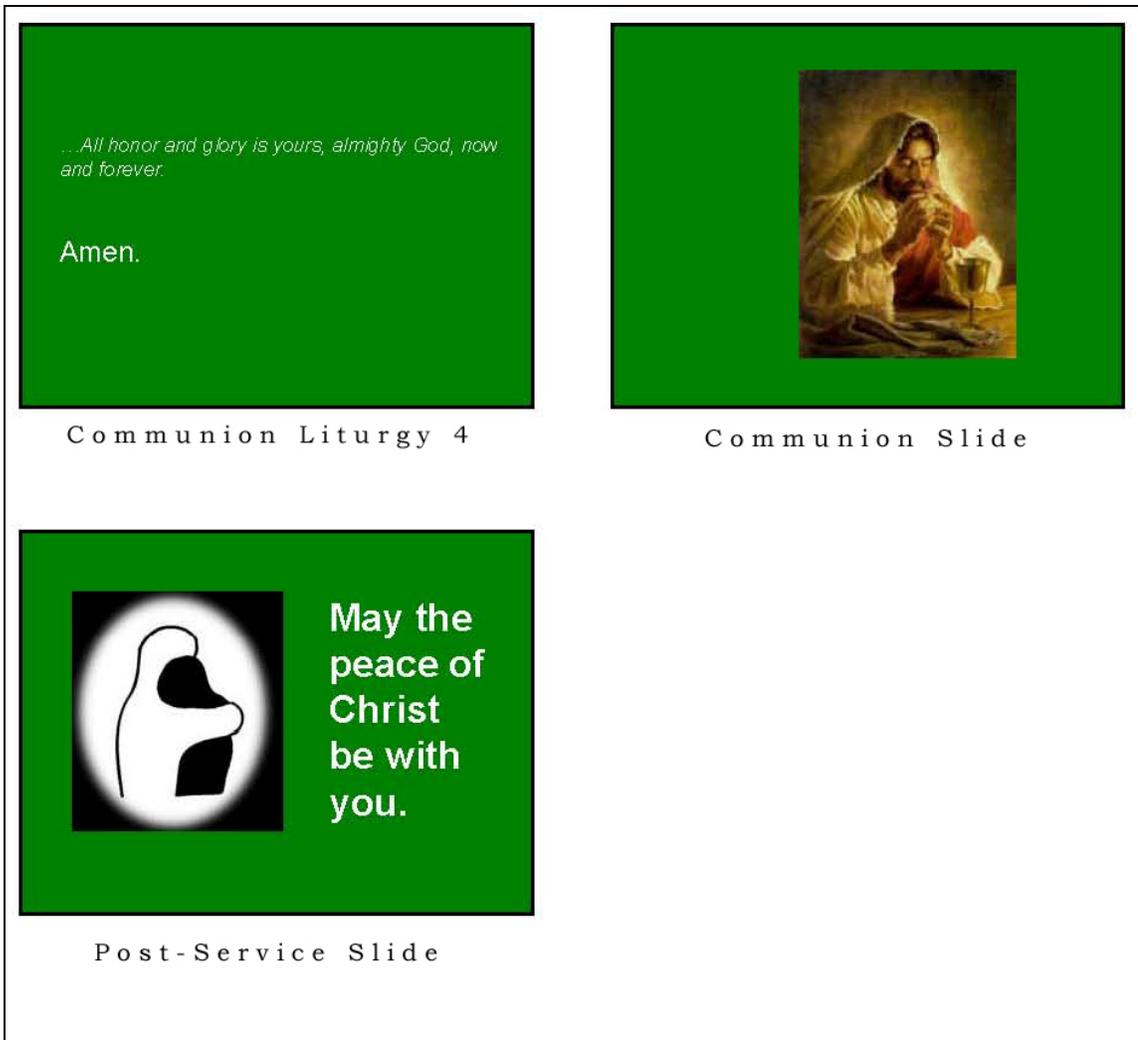
<p>Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?</p> <p>It is God who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.</p> 	<p>Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.</p> <p>To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? Says the Holy One.</p> <p>Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?</p> 
<p>Isaiah Scripture 1</p>	<p>Isaiah Scripture 2</p>
<p>God brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of God's might, and because God is strong in power not one is missing.</p> <p>Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"?</p> <p>Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, Creator of the ends of the earth.</p> 	<p>God does not faint or grow weary, God's understanding is unsearchable.</p> <p>God gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might God increases strength.</p> <p>Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;</p> 
<p>Isaiah Scripture 3</p>	<p>Isaiah Scripture 4</p>
<p>but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 40: 21-31</i></p> 	<p>And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.</p> <p>Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her.</p> <p>And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she served them.</p> 
<p>Isaiah Scripture 5</p>	<p>Mark Scripture 1</p>

Figure 31. Slides of First Church Worship Service (Cont'd).

<p>That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door.</p> <p>And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.</p> 	<p>And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him followed him, and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you."</p> 
<p>Mark Scripture 2</p>	<p>Mark Scripture 3</p>
<p>And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out."</p> <p>And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mark 1: 29-39</i></p> 	<p><i>The Lord be with you.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>And also with you.</b></p> <p><i>Lift up your hearts.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>We lift them up to the Lord.</b></p> <p><i>Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>It is right to give our thanks and praise.</b></p>
<p>Mark Scripture 4</p>	<p>Communion Liturgy 1</p>
<p><i>...And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join your unending hymn:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.</b></p>	<p><i>...And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.</b></p>
<p>Communion Liturgy 2</p>	<p>Communion Liturgy 3</p>

Figure 32. Slides of First Church Worship Service (Cont'd).



**Figure 33. Slides of First Church Worship Service (Cont'd).**

A slide was projected and Pastor Joe said aloud, “All things come from you, O God.” The congregation responded with the words on the screen (see Figure 30 – Offering Prayer) and in the bulletin. Ushers passed collection plates as the organist played music. At the end of the collection and the music the organ played the doxology (a song sung during the dedication of the offering in many churches) and the congregation stood to sing. The words to the doxology appeared on the screen (not included in Figure 30), Pastor Joe prayed, and the congregation sat down.

Pastor Joe then read the “Communion Meditation” which was printed in the bulletin and appeared on the screen. He asked the congregation to be in an attitude of

silent reflection while he slowly read the words. At its conclusion the Lay Reader returned to the lectern and read the Isaiah scripture lesson. As she read the words, the slides changed to follow her reading (see Figure 31 – Isaiah Scripture 1-5). After she was finished Pastor Joe stood up and read the Gospel lesson, the slides following his reading (see Figure 31 & 32 – Mark Scripture 1-4). Both of these scripture lessons were listed in the bulletins but were not printed there. There were however, page numbers listed, referring to the pew Bibles.

Following the reading of the Gospel Pastor Joe moved from the lectern to the pulpit (a larger looking lectern on the opposite side of the sanctuary). From the pulpit he began his sermon. There was no title for the sermon - it was simply listed as “Communion Homily.” The sermon was brief, less than ten minutes, and did not use any visuals.

The Communion Homily was followed by a hymn, “Let Us Break Bread Together.” During the hymn Pastor Joe and the Lay Reader uncovered the communion elements and stood behind the communion table. After the hymn Pastor Joe announced that the communion liturgy could be found on page 9 of the hymnal and that the congregational responses would be projected on the screen (see Figures 32 & 33 – Communion Liturgy 1-3). Pastor Joe read the liturgy, while about half of the people followed the words from the screen and the other half used their hymnals. After the liturgy, a slide appeared using the same anglicized picture of Jesus as the opening slide, and remained as the congregation received communion.

Following communion Pastor Joe read a prayer from the hymnal, although there was no slide for this prayer. He then invited the congregation to sing “Sent Forth by God’s Blessing.” Again the words were projected (although not included in Figure 33) without images. The final slide was shown (see Figure 33 – Post-Service Slide) as Pastor Joe said the benediction. Organ music began after he concluded and the congregation began to leave.

## The Purchase of Prefabricated Worship Graphics

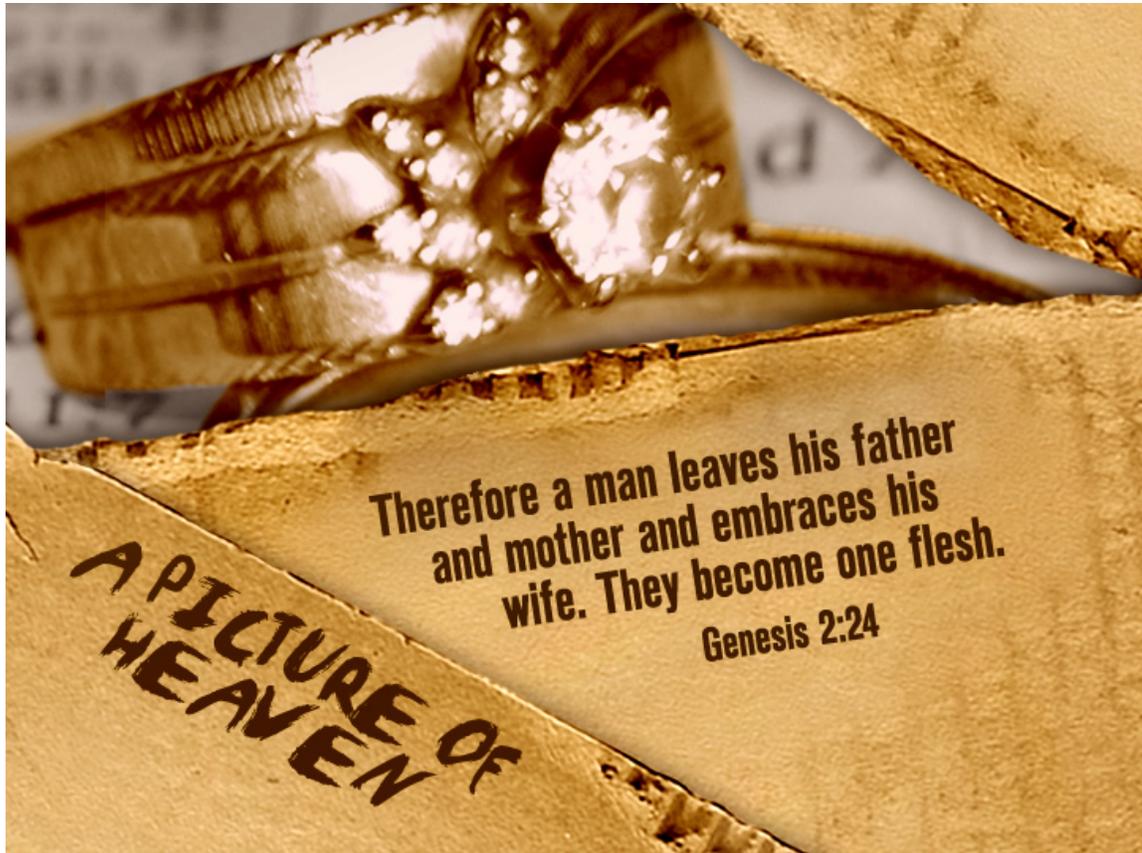
After several months of designing his own graphics, Pastor Joe learned that some churches and businesses sold professional quality graphics. Pastor Joe purchased a set of graphics from Ginghamburg Church's online store. For \$29.99 Pastor Joe was able to purchase a set of 24 graphic slides that were used at an actual Ginghamburg worship service. He chose slides of a service entitled "Why Marriage?" (see Figure 34) part of a series of services at Ginghamburg all starting with "Why." Pastor Joe was planning a service on marriage and thought these would help make the service have a more professional look.



Figure 34. Why Marriage? Worship Slide used at First Church (source: Ginghamburg).

The package of slides included a main graphic (see Figure 34), scripture lessons, sermon points, and background slides (without words) for song lyrics or other text to be projected. The slides were JPEG format and could not be altered in any way. Pastor Joe

was bothered a bit by the scriptures on the slides but did not have the ability to change the slides. He decided to use the scriptures on the slides (see Figure 35).



**Figure 35. Scripture Lesson Graphic used at First Church (source: Ginghamburg).**

After the worship service two women asked Pastor Joe to speak with him. They went to his office where they complained to him about the service. Pastor Joe knew that the women were in a committed lesbian relationship. They were upset with a specific slide that included the text of Genesis 2:24 (see Figure 35). They knew this passage but they also knew that Pastor Joe and the congregation of First Church were supportive of them as a couple. The fact that this slide highlighted a passage that neither the Pastor nor the congregation would highlight disturbed them. Pastor Joe apologized for using the slide and not considering how they might react to it.

The next day Pastor Joe received a phone call from a young woman of the congregation. She was also offended by a slide that he used in the worship service. The

slide that offended her included the text of Psalm 127:3 (see Figure 36). The text of this slide highlighted children as God's best gift to us. Pastor Joe used this slide during the Children's Time to celebrate the children as precious and God-given. What Pastor Joe did not know was that this woman had been through years of fertility treatments without the results for which she had hoped. Again Pastor Joe apologized for the pain caused by the graphics used.



Figure 36. Scripture Lesson Graphic used at First Church (source Ginghamburg).

### The Image

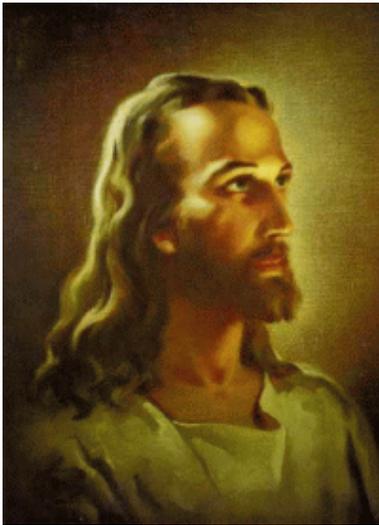
The visual image has become central to the practice of worship in churches that have adopted media ministry. But how is it that churches rooted in the iconoclastic Protestant Reformation can so openly embrace visual imagery?

Early in the twentieth century, religious educator Albert Bailey (1916; 1917; 1938) called for the use of religious imagery in Mainline Protestant churches. He

viewed the magnificent works of art in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian churches and called for Protestants to abandon the whitewashed walls.

Bailey started with the assumption that great works of art possessed “spiritual values” that the trained eye could discern. Images, in other words, were not illustrations, not avenues for transmitting information, not bound to texts but were the product of genius and therefore, although informed by texts like the Bible, were independent works of creative imagination. Images possessed the power to concentrate feeling within them – “the emotion of [the] creative personality” that created them – and to store this in the memory of the young person under the seal of the image. When recalled later in life, the images “liberate within the consciousness sometimes just the dynamic that is necessary to move the will to action, to determine the choice, to give the energizing emotion, to open a vista, to start a trend, and so in some degree to shape character (Morgan 1999).”

The results of Bailey’s efforts led to widespread use of religious works of art in Church School curricula. In addition, the acceptance of religious iconography grew significantly, evidenced by the widespread adoption of Warner Sallman’s *Head of Christ* (See Figure 37).



**Figure 37.** Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ* (1940) (source: Morgan, *Icons of American Protestantism*)

Sallman’s iconic depiction of Christ is found in almost every American Protestant church. It is often used on keepsake cards given at funerals. It is simply the

most accepted depiction of Christ in American Protestant churches. This Anglo-Saxon Christ lacks any visual features that would associate him with his historical origin – a Middle Eastern Jew. Yet the image invokes a powerful emotional response from many Christians, just as Bailey suggested.

The power of this image refutes the critiques of Walter Benjamin regarding the reproduction of visual images. Benjamin (2006/1935) claimed that the use of “mechanical reproduction” eliminates the “aura” that emanates from a work of art or performance. In his often cited article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin dismissed the use of photography, lithography and film as mechanical reproductions of the true art. That these could never impart the same “aura” that the original works produced. Sallman’s *Head of Christ* negates that argument. David Morgan (1996; 1999; 2001; 2008) has traced the use of visual images throughout Protestantism and has challenged Benjamin’s assertions.

...the evidence of Protestant devotional art in the late nineteenth century shows that Benjamin’s notion of the loss of aura is not borne out...mass-produced images became part of a piety that valued the image as a means of empathy and meditation, a way of evoking or making present the sacred reality that fine art was believed able to achieve (Morgan 1999).

The acceptance of visual imagery by American Protestantism was not limited to just mass-produced works of fine art. Popular works of art became increasingly accepted throughout the twentieth century.

Colleen McDannell (1986; 1990; 1995; 1996; 2001; 2004) has documented the artifacts of American Christian culture over the last 150 years. These artifacts include popular religious imagery that are in no way associated with fine art, but which provide a sacred aura for the religiously pious. For McDannell, the meanings of these objects are highly subjective. “The object itself, and the memories and emotions it elicits, may supersede whatever its ‘official’ theological meaning might be.” (McDannell 1995) Much like fine art there is an interpretive flexibility in Christian visual objects and images.

For Gregor Goethals (1981; 1990; 2000) the binary distinction of high art and popular art is collapsed. Meaning can and is conveyed by any form of art, regardless of its origin or even its form.

In museums as well as on television, images attest to values and world views. The essential power of images is their capacity to give material form to invisible faith. If we look back over history, we see an almost endless panorama of symbols human beings have fashioned to impose order on experience – from the handprints on a Paleolithic wall to the pervasive electronic images that leap across national barriers and boundaries. Both high and popular art document the human construction of meaning, using material of the seen, known world to interpret experience and legitimate faith (Goethals 1990).

Both high and popular art serve an important function in religious life. Meaning is transmitted by both forms and neither can claim superiority.

The entrepreneurs and industries that have and continue to arise to develop religious imagery for churches engaged in media ministry are engaged in communicating a message. Although there would be significant disagreement about the exact message they are communicating, they all seek to develop visual imagery that embodies the sacred.

The assumption is that the message they intend to convey is the message that is actually received. This assumes a universality that negates any subjectivity. It is clear from the work of McDannell and Goethals that this unambiguous reception of meaning is highly unlikely.

## **Summary**

At first the use of digital display technologies at First Church was limited to a projection of the printed bulletins, occasionally augmented with illustrative graphics. The use of graphics and text was rudimentary. A plain green background was used throughout the service and the font used was a standard Arial. The organization of textual layout was often cumbersome and difficult to read from any distance. The use of graphics was illustrative of the text and could best be described as “clip art.”

The change of medium from print to digital was not adequately addressed by the congregation. The worship service was not changed when the projector was introduced; the projector simply repeated the bulletin and added a few illustrative graphics lacking any connection to the overall message of the service. The addition of the digital display technologies in mainline churches has not reversed the membership decline.

The purchase of prefabricated worship graphics enhanced the aesthetic value of the service. However, the theological and ideological messages interpreted by some viewing the slides resulted in significant controversy. In the next chapter we will examine this and other problems associated with the technological fix of digital display technologies for Mainline churches.

## Chapter 5

### *The Unintended Consequences of the Technological Fix*

The adoption of digital display technologies by Mainline churches as a “technological fix” to declining membership has not worked. The movement of technologies developed by and for the Evangelical media ministries to the Mainline churches is a significant shift in worship presentation style and textual representation. Mainline churches employ a literal worship presentation style that is text-rich and print-oriented. The addition of more image-based materials via digital display technologies without a change in worship presentation style produces a text-rich worship experience, not a media ministry service. It “fixes” nothing.

Alvin Weinberg (1997/1966) introduced the concept of the “technological fix” in his 1966 essay “Can Technology Replace Social Engineering?” In this essay he questions the extent to which, given “the simplicity of technological engineering, and the complexity of social engineering, to what extent can social problems be circumvented by reducing them to technological problems (Weinberg 1997/1966)?”

The decline of attendance and membership in the Mainline churches is a social problem, requiring a social engineering solution. As Weinberg notes, “...Technological Fixes do not get to the heart of the problem; they are at best temporary expedients; they create new problems...” (Weinberg 1997/1966).

#### **Theological and Ideological Incongruity**

Some Mainline churches that adopted digital display technologies have incorporated the visual media produced by other churches or one of several new businesses developing media content for churches (See Appendix C for more on this new industry). Few churches can afford to pay media designers, as Ginghamburg can. Media production is costly, so churches that produce media each week have discovered that they can sell the media content to other churches to use in their worship services.

The churches and businesses developing media content are Evangelical. They are located on the Literal side of the Biblical Interpretation axis. The difference between literal and metaphoric interpretations of the bible is more than a hermeneutical

difference; these are completely different epistemological worldviews. These two subdivisions of Christianity do not even use the same version of the Bible. Mainline churches engage in exegesis which incorporates historical criticism to provide cultural context. Evangelicals use biblical texts to endorse their assertions, known as proof-texting (quoting scriptures out of context to “prove” one’s argument).

Evangelical churches hold a patriarchal worldview, reinforced by their literal interpretations of the biblical text. In Table 1, the textual representations of Mainline and Evangelical churches are compared. Evangelicals use male-privileged language for God and for people in the Bible. For example, John 1:6-7 in the New International Version reads:

*There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.*

In the New Revised Standard it reads:

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.*

The use of male-privileged language for people is incorporated in the New International Version and not in the New Revised Standard Version. Many Mainline churches use inclusive language for both people and God (i.e. not referring to God as He). There are however, some Mainline churches that continue to use male-privileged language for God.

**Table 1. Textual Representation in Mainline and Evangelical Churches.**

	<b>Mainline (L-M)</b>	<b>Evangelical (M-L)</b>
<b>Bible Version</b>	New Revised Standard Version	New International Version
<b>Bible Use</b>	Exegesis	Proof-texting
<b>People Language</b>	Inclusive	Male-privileged
<b>God Language</b>	Inclusive & Male-centered	Male-privileged

These hermeneutical and epistemological differences between Evangelical and Mainline churches are expressed in the polities of the denominations represent these categories. The Southern Baptist Convention, an Evangelical denomination, does not allow women to be pastors. Its position on women in ministry is:

Their role is crucial, their wisdom, grace and commitment exemplary. Women are an integral part of our Southern Baptist boards, faculties, mission teams, writer pools, and professional staffs. We affirm and celebrate their Great Commission impact. While Scripture teaches that a woman's role is not identical to that of men in every respect, and that pastoral leadership is assigned to men, it also teaches that women are equal in value to men.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast, the United Methodist Church provides the following statement on the “Rights of Women:”

We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. We therefore urge that every effort be made to eliminate sex-role stereotypes in activity and portrayal of family life and in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society. We affirm the right of women to equal treatment in employment, responsibility, promotion, and compensation. We affirm the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of Church and society and urge such bodies to guarantee their presence through policies of employment and recruitment.<sup>50</sup>

These two incongruent positions on women are expressed not only in their polities but also in the media content produced by their churches and businesses. Our values are expressed in how we represent others. A content analysis of media produced reveals important patterns in terms of persons represented in the visual images used in worship. Table 2 summarizes a content analysis of three companies and one church producing and selling worship graphics for use in other churches, a simple count of men and women represented in the graphic images. For the first two companies the product was a single disc of graphic images sold as a package. Lumicon produced three books that included DVDs of its graphics. Ginghamburg sells its weekly graphics online; this represents the entire store as of March 1, 2009. The overall discovery is that women are significantly underrepresented.

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<sup>49</sup> From Position Statements on Southern Baptist website [www.sbc.net](http://www.sbc.net) accessed February, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> From *The Book of Discipline 2008* ¶162.F.

**Table 2. Content Analysis of Prefabricated Media.**

<i>Company</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total # of Graphics</i>
<b>Worship Films<sup>51</sup></b>	23	2	<b>20</b>
<b>Midnight Oil<sup>52</sup></b>	13	0	<b>30</b>
<b>Lumicon<sup>53</sup></b>	11	6	<b>30</b>
<b>Ginghamsburg<sup>54</sup></b>	56	27	<b>240</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>320</b>

There is a magazine devoted to media ministry entitled *Technologies for Worship*. Published in Canada this magazine, has a wide distribution throughout the United States. By the end of 1999, circulation was 5,000. By 2008, *Technologies for Worship* circulation mushroomed – over 30,000. In 2006, they stopped charging for subscriptions and began free distribution (paid by its advertisers) to churches and individuals.

Employing the same method of content analysis as used for the prefabricated media, Table 3 counts the number of women and men portrayed in the advertisements of *Technologies for Worship*. The technological artifacts were the primary objects depicted in these ads, but individuals were also displayed. There were more males depicted than females, as can be seen in these results.

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<sup>51</sup> Worship Films, “Free to Worship,” *Worship Backgrounds*, Vol. 3, No. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Midnight Oil Productions, *Spark*, Vol. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Lumicon Digital Productions, *Fresh Out of the Box Vols. 1, 3, 4*.

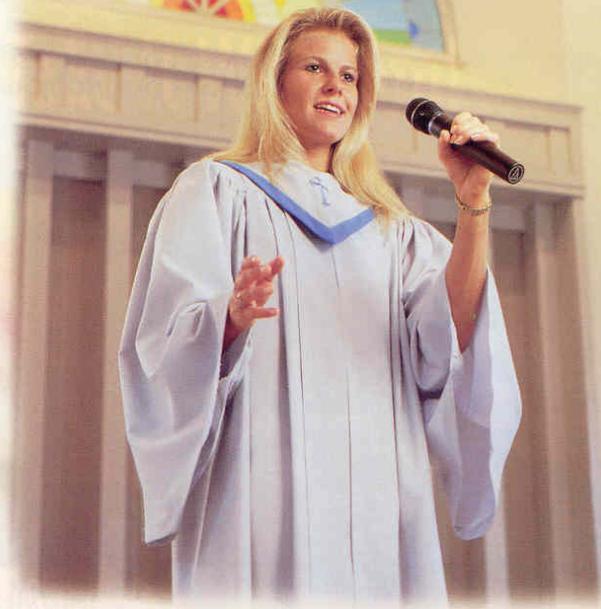
<sup>54</sup> Ginghamsburg E-Store, graphics used in worship and sold online.

**Table 3. Content Analysis of Ads in *Technologies for Worship*.**

<i>Issue of TFW</i>	<i>Males in Ads</i>	<i>Females in Ads</i>	<i>Total number of Ads</i>
<b>January 2000</b>	5	1	<b>38</b>
<b>March 2000</b>	3	2	<b>43</b>
<b>May 2000</b>	7	2	<b>43</b>
<b>July 2000</b>	12	7	<b>60</b>
<b>Sept. 2000</b>	3	2	<b>54</b>
<b>January 2001</b>	7	6	<b>40</b>
<b>March 2001</b>	18	5	<b>52</b>
<b>May 2001</b>	10	12	<b>52</b>
<b>July 2001</b>	14	16	<b>74</b>
<b>Sept. 2001</b>	4	3	<b>54</b>
<b>Nov. 2001</b>	4	2	<b>48</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>558</b>

Looking even closer at the men and women depicted in the advertisements we can categorize the role of each of the men and women. This can be accomplished by using three distinct categories: A User of the Technology, A Controller of the Technology, and No Role. A User of Technology is someone who does not control the technology but does use it (see Figure 38 as an example of this). A Controller of the Technology both uses and controls the technology (see Figure 39 as an example of this). The final category of “No Role” was the single most frequent observance in the advertisements. These consisted of pictures of faces or entire bodies that had no relation to the technology and represented exactly 77% of both the women and the men depicted in these ads. Excluding this category and looking simply at Users versus Controllers of the technology we have Table 4 (see below). Women are overwhelmingly depicted as users of the technology and men are overwhelmingly depicted as controllers of the technology.

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Audio-Technica has created a wireless system that sounds so good, you'll think it's a wired mic! We did this by combining the condenser element from our legendary AT4033 studio microphone with the RF performance of our proven 7000 Series UHF wireless system.

Originally developed to meet the demanding standards of professional recording studios, the AT4033 element provides unprecedented audio quality in a wireless. Mounted in a rugged handheld transmitter with enhanced internal shock

mounting, it gives you outstanding clarity and consistency of sound with minimal handling noise.



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Add to that the versatility of 100 switchable channels, uncrowded UHF frequency band operation and true diversity reception, and it's no wonder the ATW-7373 system is setting a new benchmark in wireless performance.

Best of all, the superb audio quality of the affordable ATW-7373 goes head-to-head with even the most expensive wireless systems available.

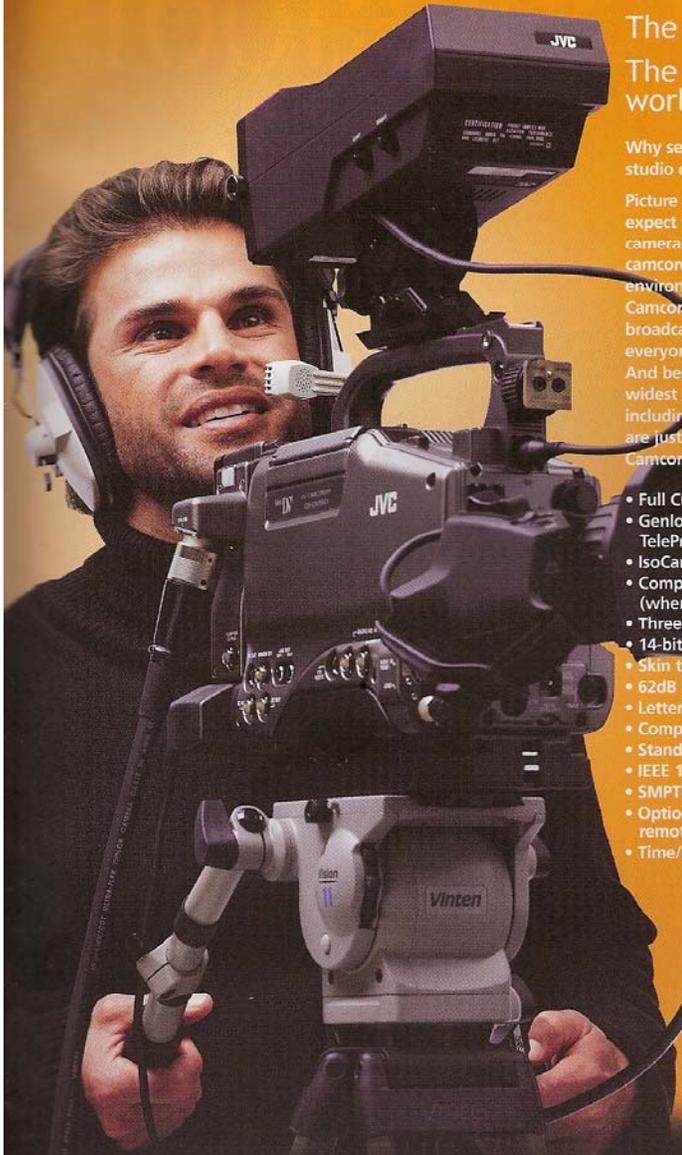
And that's something to be joyful about!



Audio-Technica U.S., Inc. | 1221 Commerce Drive, Stow, OH 44224 | 330.686.2600 | Fax: 330.686.0719 | E-mail: pro@atus.com | www.audio-technica.com

Figure 38. Example of "User of Technology" in Ads (source: Technologies for Worship Magazine).

# JVC shoots. You go live.



The JVC Studio DV Camcorder.  
The only DV camcorder in the world to offer full CCU control.

Why settle for an ordinary camera when you can get full studio capabilities in a DV camcorder!

Picture the features, performance and accessories you'd expect from a full bandwidth CCU-controllable studio camera. Pack it all into a standalone Professional DV camcorder that handles even the most challenging ENG environments with ease... and you've got the Studio DV Camcorder. Fully digital, end-to-end, it's ideal for broadcasters, but priced within reach of virtually everyone—from webcasters to educators to churches. And because it uses MiniDV cassettes, it offers the widest compatibility of any professional digital camcorder, including playback on DVCAM™ and DVCPRO™. Here are just a few more reasons why the JVC Studio DV Camcorder simply outperforms anything in its class:

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- Skin tone detail correction
- 62dB SN/800+ line camera resolution
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- Composite Video Input
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- SMPTE Timecode in/out
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\* Compared to list price if products were purchased separately  
Circle Reader Response #61

Figure 39. Example of "Controller of Technology" from Ads (source: Technologies for Worship Magazine)

**Table 4. Role of Males and Females in Ads in *Technologies for Worship*.**

<b><i>Role in Ad</i></b>	<b><i>Males</i></b>	<b><i>Females</i></b>
<b>User of Technology</b>	38%	69%
<b>Controller of Technology</b>	62%	31%

The number of women and men who contributed as authors to this magazine also reflects gender politics. Table 5 shows a stark contrast of 173 male authors to 19 female authors. Of the women contributing, most did so as part of a mixed sex couple. If we remove the couples who coauthored articles we are left with 161 male authors and just 7 female authors.

**Table 5. Content Analysis of Authors Gender in *Technologies for Worship*.**

<b><i>Issue of TFW</i></b>	<b><i>Male Authors</i></b>	<b><i>Female Authors</i></b>
<b>January 2000</b>	16	2
<b>March 2000</b>	19	2
<b>May 2000</b>	15	2
<b>July 2000</b>	14	1
<b>September 2000</b>	13	2
<b>January 2001</b>	15	1
<b>March 2001</b>	16	4
<b>May 2001</b>	19	2
<b>July 2001</b>	16	0
<b>September 2001</b>	17	2
<b>November 2001</b>	13	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>19</b>

Comparing these results with a gender count of authors of a similar but non-religious magazine, *Presentations*<sup>55</sup> we find that there is a significant difference between the two. During the same period of time (2000-2001) 59% of all articles in *Presentations* were authored by males, while only 41% were authored by females. This is contrasted with *Technologies for Worship* where 90% were authored by males and 10% by females. The difference in these two statistics indicates a significant and quantifiable exclusion of women from leadership roles in media ministry that cannot be explained simply by the gendered associations of technologies with men.

### **The Rise of the Media Minister**

One of the most significant developments in the 1990s was the introduction of a new position within some churches often titled Media Minister.<sup>56</sup> Before 1990 this position simply did not exist, yet today there are numerous Media Ministers who perform similar technical tasks at churches throughout the country. Most of these are volunteers who have been given this title, but some churches, usually larger, include this position on the paid staff.

The definition of a Media Minister varies from church to church and there is no standardization to the position. Len Wilson in his text *The Wired Church (1999)* offers a detailed description of the duties of a Media Minister based on his experience at Ginghamburg (see Appendix A). Although this represents the duties of some of the Media Ministers, it is far from standard.

An example of a Mainline media ministry comes from Community Church. Community Church in Jackson Heights, NY made a critical decision in the late 1990s. The pastor was brought in to revitalize a multi-cultural congregation in which several languages were commonly spoken during worship. The pastor, Ron Tompkins, decided to hire a Minister of Media instead of a second pastor to assist him. He believed that visual media and projections of translations of the spoken words could bridge the

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<sup>55</sup> *Presentations* is a freely distributed magazine to business professionals who need to learn how to more effectively produce PowerPoint presentations.

<sup>56</sup> Other common titles include Director of Media or Technical Director.

language gap at this church and unite the congregation in ways that another pastor could never hope to do.<sup>57</sup>

Another example, this one from a Fundamentalist church, is Fellowship Church, Grapevine, Texas, founded in 1990. Almost from the start it included media as part of the worship experience. The church was built around the media; it hired a Media Pastor and a staff of more than 75 (mostly part-time) in technical positions. Most of these individuals were professionals in the broadcast or some other technical field. The technical setup is like no other church I have ever experienced. The control room has all the latest broadcast quality technology (see Figure 40).

Fellowship has a very large broadcast ministry that explains some of the equipment, but not all. No one was able to tell me how much has been spent on this equipment but the response I received was that the church had just completed a \$3 million upgrade in equipment. The equipment includes two Chyron graphics generators to display song lyrics and titles. A typical sports network would only use one.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> [www.onechurchnyc.com](http://www.onechurchnyc.com)

<sup>58</sup> I was told that the Chyron's are so unreliable that two were needed to ensure that if one fails the other will work. These are approximately \$250K each.



**Figure 40. Control Room Fellowship Church, Grapevine, TX (Fenimore 2004)**

The extraordinary investment in state-of-the-art technical equipment would be significant for any organization, but for a church, such expenditure is truly remarkable. Churches are often considered significantly behind the times in terms of technological adaptation. Why are Fellowship and many other churches like it making significant investments in technology and technological expertise?

One common theological justification given to answer this question is the need to be culturally relevant, with a subtext of bringing youth and young adults back to the church. Evangelical Christians, the early adopters of these technologies, are willing to experiment with methodology as long as the same result (i.e. conversion) is attained.<sup>59</sup>

As a media-saturated society, the level of media competency is quite high. Typical viewers may not know how to produce graphics on a screen, but they recognize when they are done well and when they are not. Therefore for the church to appease the

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<sup>59</sup> In many ways the introduction of the technology represents a “technological fix” to a cultural problem that has more to do with the dissatisfaction of the institutional church and general church decline.

media critics (almost everybody these days), it must employ high standards of technology and technological expertise.

As some churches have become successful in their ventures into media ministry, many other churches want to be part of this success and seek to replicate what they have done. This opens a huge market for potential Media Ministers as well as the ability to train and equip them.

### **The Technologist vs. The Theologian**

The recent development of the position of Media Minister has added a new, sometimes conflict-laden dynamic, to the staffing of churches. By separating out the roles of theologian (pastor) and technologist (media minister) the question ultimately needs to be asked: Who controls the message?

Marshall McLuhan (1962; 1964; 1967; 1967; 1968; 1969; 1970; 1980; 1988; 1995) and his foundational work on the medium and the message affirms that the medium has an affect on the message being communicated. Similarly, Langdon Winner (1980) argues that technologies are not value-neutral and in fact can perpetuate an ideological, or in this case theological, message in and of themselves. Therefore the introduction of these novel digital display technologies in the context of worship can produce competing messages: one spoken and one seen.

If the goal in a worship service is to communicate an unambiguous message through multiple media, then the technology needs to be viewed as an integral part of the message, and the limitations of that technology need to be understood and provisions made to compensate for them. An instrumental view of these digital display technologies could lead to competing messages. Len Wilson writes about this dynamic in his text, *The Wired Church*:

A typical transition for a pastor, preacher, or church leader into electronic media initially means continuing to compose sermons without brainstorming groups or electronic media input, then finally tacking on AV support to a completed message. Over time, a leader's understanding gradually molds to composing central themes and structural points, to finally utilizing visual concepts in the conceptual stage of planning. Unfortunately, many leaders never get beyond this first step because it means sharing responsibility of this creative process with others. It means

forming creative teams. This is the second reason, giving up control of the most powerful icon of a pastor's leadership, the pulpit.<sup>60</sup>

The idea of clergy giving up "control" of the pulpit may be the most difficult issue confronting the effective use of visual media in worship.

Within the church, and especially within the conservative Evangelical church tradition, hierarchy is more than simply a staffing organizational chart; it is a divinely established order not to be questioned. The idea of sharing control of the message in any form of level hierarchy between theologian and technologist may be more idealistic than realistic.

### **Women as Pastors of Mainline Churches Using Media Ministry**

Mainline churches have polities that are inclusive of women in the leadership structure. In 2000, women constituted nearly 35% of all Mainline Protestant seminary students training to be clergy in the US.<sup>61</sup> My own denomination, The United Methodist Church, has ordained women as pastors since 1956 and women have attained all levels of leadership including the highest level, Bishop in 1980. Evangelical churches follow literal interpretations of the Bible prohibiting women from ministry. The natural order is defined by the "created order" that prescribes "man's dominion over all of creation," as described in Genesis 2, the story of the Garden of Eden and the creation of man.

The actual exclusionary treatment of women in ministry goes well beyond the Evangelical churches and includes Mainline denominations like my own. The exclusion occurs not because women lack the skills and competency to work in the field of media ministry, but because there are deeper cultural biases.

Clergy are either called or appointed to churches based on denominational polity. The "call system" is based on the congregation hiring (or calling) a pastor to be employed at its church. The "appointive system" involves a Bishop who sends (appoints) a pastor to a local church. In both of these systems individuals in small staff-

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<sup>60</sup> Wilson, L. (1999). *The Wired Church: Making Media Ministry*. Nashville, Abingdon Press.

<sup>61</sup> According to statistics collected by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. These figures are for 2000 and represent the vast number of seminaries through North America. Clergy of independent and non-denominational churches often are not required to have any seminary training.

responsible groups can perpetuate a rejection of women pastors wishing to serve churches using media ministry.

### **The Socio-Technological Fix**

Clearly the technological fix has not worked for the Mainline churches seeking to increase their attendance, and Mainline churches have not grown from their attempt to employ technology to solve their problems. In addition, the unintended consequences of this solution have produced incongruent theologies and ideologies. Mainline churches, with gender equality policies and practices, are underrepresenting women through their adoption of Evangelical media content.

If the “technological fix” is not going to work then where can we turn? Socio-technical theory, originating in the mid-1900s and associated with the Tavistock Institute in London, suggests a need to optimize both the social and technical systems jointly. This approach focuses on work group interactions as opposed to individual job performance (Mumford and Banks 1967; Mumford and Weir 1979; Trist, Murray et al. 1990; Coakes, Willis et al. 2000). Linda Layne introduces the “cultural fix” as an anthropological contribution to Science and Technology Studies (Layne 2000). She advocates a “lifting of the taboo surrounding pregnancy loss” (Layne 2000) as a cultural fix that moves beyond the technological fixes of the medical community for pregnancy loss. Similarly, Weinberg (1997/1966) challenges us to employ social changes for social problems. The difficulty with this “social fix” is that it is difficult to get people to change their habits and behaviors.

The Mainline churches suffer from a social problem, not a technical problem; the solution I attempted at Christ Church is a socio-technological fix using digital display technologies but developing a social process that changes the worship presentation from Literal to Metaphoric. I propose that Mainline churches seeking to incorporate digital display technologies need to develop a socio-technological process that allows a church to move from text-rich worship to visually-rich worship.

## **Conclusions**

Adoption of digital display technologies by the Mainline churches has been highly problematic. Mainline churches have sought to solve the social problem of declining worship attendance with a technological fix that has resulted in unintended consequences. The movement across two axes of the matrix has resulted in problems in both worship presentation and Biblical interpretation.

Worship presentation for Mainline churches has resulted in the projection of text-based liturgies onto a screen, a “technological fix” producing more problems than it has solved.

For those churches that have added prefabricated content in conjunction with the use of digital display technologies, additional problems have arisen. Theological and ideological incongruities have resulted in an underrepresentation of women.

One solution to this problem is the implementation of a socio-technological fix. The next chapter provides an example of my attempt to develop this approach.

## Chapter 6

### *Christ Church: A Mainline Experiment in Participatory Worship Design*

Throughout these chapters we have explored the rise of media ministry in American Protestant Christianity. We explored the celebrity culture that dominates Ginghamburg, the construction of masculinity through the technological spectacle of the Promise Keepers, the adoption of digital display technologies by a Mainline congregation, and the problems associated with this technological fix. What is clear at this point is that the incorporation of media ministry into the context of Christian worship is at best highly problematic. This chapter outlines an experiment at a particular Mainline church, Christ Church. The experiment was intended to develop a method to introduce media ministry into worship without experiencing the significant issues encountered thus far.

Before we can explore the case study of Christ Church, we need to gain an epistemological foundation. We need to understand two key concepts in new media studies that were crucial components for the development of media ministry at Christ Church: participatory culture and collective intelligence.

#### **Participatory Culture & Collective Intelligence**

The idea of Participatory culture developed by Henry Jenkins (1998; 2002; 2003; 2003; 2006; 2006) is a result of the new media technologies that have become increasingly available to consumers.

Patterns of media consumption have been profoundly altered by a succession of new media technologies which enable average citizens to participate in the archiving, annotation, appropriation, transformation, and recirculation of media content. Participatory culture refers to the new style of consumerism that emerges in this environment. If media convergence is to become a viable corporate strategy, it will be because consumers have learned new ways to interact with media content. Not surprisingly, participatory culture is running ahead of the technological developments necessary to sustain industrial visions of media convergence and thus making demands on popular culture which the studios are not yet, and perhaps never will be, able to satisfy. The first and foremost demand consumers make is the right to participate in the creation and distribution of media narratives. Media consumers want to

become media producers, while media producers want to maintain their traditional dominance over media content (Jenkins 2006).

The distinction between producer and consumer dissolves as both interact and dissolve the boundaries that once existed between them.

Participatory culture is similar to “citizen experts” (Fischer 2000) in environmental policy, or “deliberative democracy” (Hamlett 2003) in political theory. It is embodied in the rise of YouTube and open source software design.

Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands (Jenkins 2006).

Participatory culture is not a methodology but a culture. It is fueled by new technologies that empower users/consumers. The availability of digital cameras, camcorders, computers, editing software and digital audio allows an average consumer to become a media producer.

Susan Sontag (1977; 2003; 2004) documents how photography has changed with the proliferation of personal digital cameras. She writes in response to the horrific photographs of Abu Ghraib:

A digital camera is a common possession among soldiers. Where once photographing war was the province of photojournalists, now the soldiers themselves are all photographers -- recording their war, their fun, their observations of what they find picturesque, their atrocities -- and swapping images among themselves and e-mailing them around the globe (Sontag 2004).

We have no shortage of photographs. The digital camera and the Internet have produced an enormous collection of photographs. This, however, has not reduced the symbolic value of the photograph. Photographs are a “pseudo-presence” of people, objects and places that invoke emotional responses (Sontag 1977).

Ginghamsburg and all the media producers studied thus far operate under the “old media” paradigm of producers and consumers. The hierarchal structure of Evangelical Christianity precludes them from engaging in a participatory culture. The need to dominate and control the message intensifies the boundaries between consumer

and producer. The result is a worship experience that requires very little from the consumer. The consumer/congregant response is measured by worship attendance. This simplistic measure of consumer response may be appropriate for generating content for a television program but not for a worship service.

A second key concept of new media is collective intelligence, which comes from Pierre Lévy (1997; 1998; 2001) and has been expanded upon by Howard Bloom (2000) and Howard Rheingold (2003). Lévy believes the Internet and its potential to connect people worldwide can develop a collective intelligence that can undermine the current structures of power.

If information is power, then this new technology – which is the first to evenly distribute power. The power is shifting from institutions that have always been run top down, hoarding information at the top, telling us how to run our lives, to a new paradigm of power that is democratically distributed and shared by us all (Trippi 2004).

This redistribution of power is embodied in Wikipedia – the online encyclopedia of knowledge – an example of collective intelligence on a small scale.

The goal of collective intelligence is to include a multiplicity of voices which is as divergent as possible. The greatest desire is to connect all the voices of humanity, but a more realistic goal is to garner a significant sample of community in question. In American Protestant Christianity the closest example of this is the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers, who do not have clergy and practice an egalitarian form of worship.

At Ginghamburg the collective intelligence was limited to the few staff that composed the Design Team. Diversity was limited, and as we have seen in Chapter 2 the freedom to express opposing opinions was severely limited. Lumicon Digital Productions (Dallas, TX), a media content producer, did seek to develop a form of collective intelligence. Tom Boomershine who led Lumicon (2000-2003) described the process for the development of graphics:

We developed a team process in which everyone had to agree on an image. I brought to that a set of criteria that I gradually became clearer about. I would measure things by congruence with the overall impact of the meaning of the story, and its original context, in its image world. And then to try think about to identify what will happen to this image in the digital world – a critical process. And what other images is it associated with in the culture. What's the impact of the image? What is it for

particular groups? What is it for the large group? There are a whole series of complex political considerations because they are so free-floating in relation to meaning. And it is difficult to control the meaning of an image.<sup>62</sup>

Lumicon did intentionally seek a diversity of voices and understood the value of collective intelligence but were also limited to the small staff that was employed there.

Combining participatory culture with collective intelligence in a church (outside of the Quaker tradition) requires that those with power – clergy and other staff members – give up their power and control. If this can be done, the result can be an empowering of the “laity” to develop and use new forms of media in a participatory fashion. This was my goal at Christ Church.

This goal is rooted in my theological heritage as a United Methodist. The United Methodist Church declares in its *Social Principles*, “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore combining participatory culture and collective intelligence reflects an ecclesiological understanding of the church that respects, empowers and seeks to embody all persons.

## **Christ Church**

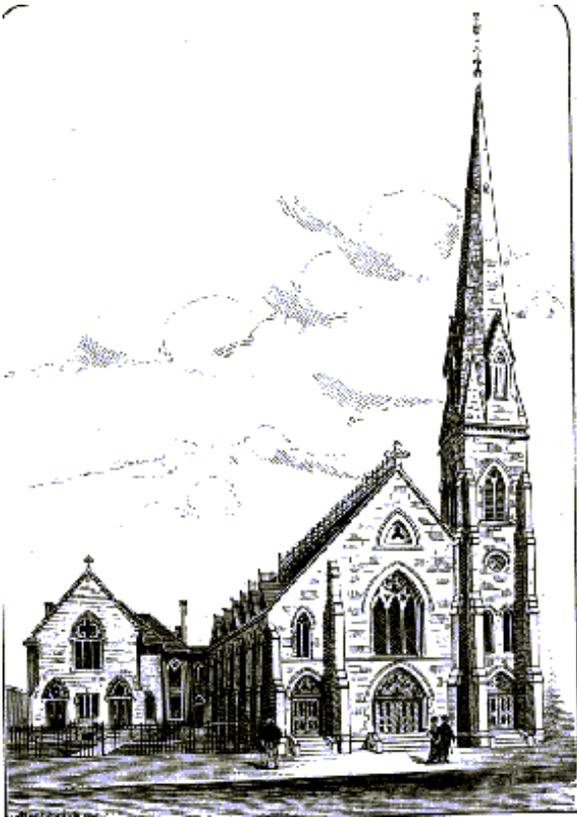
Christ Church is located in downtown Troy, New York. It is a United Methodist church<sup>64</sup> with a long and rich history. The church was founded in 1808 and the first church building, a wooden structure, was built in 1811. It grew rapidly during its early years, reflecting the rapid growth of Troy, which grew from 1200 residents in 1800 to over 35,000 by 1860 (Sylvester 1880). During that same period the church membership grew from 30 to 906, although regular attendance was rarely greater than a few hundred (Hillman 1888). In 1827 a brick building was erected, but it was not long before a new, even more impressive edifice was built. Having escaped the Great Fire of 1862 which damaged a great portion of downtown Troy, the church decided to build its “last building,” a great Gothic structure completed in 1871. It was designed to seat 900 even though they had yet to reach that number of regular attendees.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Tom Boomershine, June 19, 2004.

<sup>63</sup> From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008*, ¶161.F.

<sup>64</sup> This church is part of the same denomination as Ginghamburg Church. The denomination is theologically diverse especially in different regions of the United States.



**Figure 41. Christ Church (Hillman 1888).**

The church continued to grow until the 1920s, when with the rise of the automobile, the city of Troy grew farther away from downtown. In the 1960s Troy began a rapid decline when several of the industries that had historically fueled the growth of the city shut down or moved from the city. The population of Troy declined to 67,492 from its peak of nearly 80,000 in 1910.

The social dynamics of the 1950s and early 1960s also brought the end of the church as the dominant social organization. The 1960s represented the beginning of a major shift in society, in which the church was relegated to a minor role. The Roman Catholic Church, seeking to retain its strength in the social order, held the Second Vatican Council in which the church modified its worship, changing the language of the Mass from Latin to the vernacular.

The Mainline denominations, including United Methodists, were slower to respond and did not make any significant changes in the suggested worship style until

1992, when it adopted a *Book of Worship* that reflected a return to more ancient patterns of worship, predating the worship of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The failure to incorporate changes in the worship ritual following the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s in the United Methodist church, as well as other Mainline denominations is one of the factors leading to the rise of the Evangelical churches (often not affiliated with any denomination) which combined a contemporary worship style with a conservative theology. This is not to say that only Evangelical churches adopted the contemporary worship style. In fact, many United Methodist churches abandoned traditional worship styles, in part because the denomination does not require its churches to adhere to any particular style. Ginghamsburg is an example of a United Methodist church that did not conform to the dominant denominational worship style. Christ Church, however, was a church that retained the traditional worship patterns and did so until very recently.

I became the Senior Pastor of Christ Church in 1997, following a pastor who had served in that position for 12 years. Worship at the church was traditional. The service included a number of Biblical text readings, hymns (songs usually 100 years or older), responsive prayers/readings, and unison prayers. All of these elements were combined with the typical focal point of a Protestant worship service, the sermon.

In 1999, I introduced an evening worship service called Soul Café. It was designed as a worship service with an informal coffeehouse atmosphere in which the text for the day came from a movie and the music was provided by local musicians. This alternative worship service was so far from the traditional worship service its authenticity as worship was often questioned by those who attended since so many of the elements of a traditional worship service were missing.

Christ Church had a number of competent technologists. In addition to my combined skills as theologian and technologist, there were four others who regularly ran technical equipment at the church. They included my wife, Susan, and three lay men who were all employed in the computer industry. Soul Café allowed these technologists to learn how the various technologies worked and to discover their limitations. It provided a relaxed atmosphere in which to experiment and learn how to use the new

technologies associated with the video projector. It also provided a way for congregants to experience the way technology could be used in a worship service.

When I returned from an educational leave in the fall of 2004, during which time I conducted research for my dissertation, I began to share with my congregation what I had learned from the churches I had studied. This congregation I had been with for more than seven years asked that I employ the knowledge I gained to their benefit.

During the winter of 2005, I began constructing worship services in a completely new way. I employed a “Worship Planning Team” that was a modification of the Worship Design Team at Ginghamburg UMC. These “experimental” worship services were held in our Fellowship Hall in which we installed the technology we had used for Soul Café.<sup>65</sup> After these five services I asked the congregation to consider adopting this model of worship. This would require a significant technical upgrade to the church sanctuary which had been virtually unchanged since its construction in 1871. We entered into a period of discernment during the Christian liturgical season of Lent. Open forums were conducted to inform and solicit feedback from the congregation and several teams were formed to consider the technological needs.

On April 17, 2005 the church made a decision to experiment with multimedia worship. The church agreed to spend nearly \$100,000 in technological and architectural renovations and abandon the form of worship that was for some the only form of worship they had ever known.

The decision was based on the way the technology was used and more importantly, the way it was not used. As I conducted my research I discovered the use of screens can be more a distraction than aid to worship. In our experimental services we were careful to limit the use of the screen. We decided to use it as a canvas to compliment what was going on in the service, never to become the service itself.

### **Technological Design Decisions**

I formed a group called the “Planning and Construction Team,” consisting of six men and three women including myself. Each person represented either an important leadership position in the church or brought to the group technical expertise. This group

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<sup>65</sup> For a detailed description of what these services were like, see below.

was charged with developing the specifications of the technologies needed, to secure bids for this design, and to oversee the construction. I charged them with the task of designing a technological system to enable the kind of “experimental worship” we had conducted earlier in the year.



**Figure 42. Christ Church sanctuary before installation (Fenimore 2004).**

One of the greatest challenges facing the church was adding digital display technologies without violating the architecture. The sanctuary is Gothic in form and large screens would deter from the beauty of the architecture. Churches adding digital display technologies often choose front or rear projection using a digital video projector. Neither of those options would work for this space. I suggested a novel approach, one that I had seen incorporated at a church named The Rock in Roseville, California. The Rock used an LCD television for its small sanctuary. I suggested the use of large plasma televisions. Plasma screens had been dropping in price and growing in size thanks to the

home entertainment market. The team recommended four plasma screens to be installed in a way that least detracted from the architecture.

At this point the “experts,” sales representatives from audio visual companies, were called in to provide advice and give a quote for the design. Two major firms were selected to bid on the project. One firm included a sales representative who also worked on a technical crew in a local Evangelical church using video technology. He insisted that plasma screens would not work. He said we needed two ten foot by twelve foot screens mounted in the balcony with projectors behind them. When we questioned the amount of light in the balcony, he explained we would need to cover almost all the windows.

Some on the team were swayed by this suggestion from an “expert” and questioned whether the plasma screens would work. After all, they had never seen a church that used plasma screens in worship. In the end, the team decided to continue with our original plan. The firm relented and gave a quote on what we had designed. Their revised quote was determined to be the best quote and we awarded the work to them in June 2005. Our target date for completion was the first Sunday in September 2005.



**Figure 43. Plasma Screens at Christ Church (Fenimore 2005).**

The construction phase included the installation of four plasma screens, three remotely controlled video cameras for recording the services, and a new sound system. With the exception of the plasma video screens, the rest of the installation needed to be hidden, including the many cables were needed to connect all of these devices. Most of the cables were installed by volunteers in order to save money and ensure completion by the target date.



**Figure 44. Running cables throughout Christ Church (Fenimore 2005).**

We located the control center for the sound and video technologies in the balcony where the technicians could see and hear the worship service without being seen. Hiding the technology, or at least seeking to have the technology blend into the architecture, was a primary concern of the congregation. Not only did this allow the grand architecture to remain the dominant visual aspect of the church, it also made a theological statement – namely, that technology is not the dominant feature of the church.



**Figure 45. The control center in the balcony of Christ Church (Fenimore 2005).**

### **Theological and Technological Education**

Well before the Planning and Construction Team began its work in the Spring of 2005, we added some educational and worship programs within Christ Church to help make the Worship Planning Team effective in designing worship. Through my research I discovered that a clear hierarchical relationship between theologian and technologist is quite common. Even at Ginghamburg where technologists and theologians gather together in planning sessions, there are clear understandings of who is in control. I felt that the lack of cross-fertilization between these two domains would hamper the creative process. I personally prefer a more egalitarian approach.

Christ Church sought to change this potential pitfall in the worship planning process by employing two specific training programs and building upon two previous theological educational projects of the church. Soul Café and the use of the Mystery

Bag for the children's time of worship allowed the congregation to begin the process of understanding theological reflection.

***Soul Café: A tool for teaching theological reflection***

The alternative worship service at Christ Church provided those who attended more than an evening of music and a movie clip, it provided an opportunity to learn ways to reflect theologically on everyday experiences. In traditional worship, the service is structured around a scripture or set of scriptures with accompanying reflection, in order to help attendees understand the ways scripture can be applied to their lives. At Soul Café, the process was reversed. Life experiences, as evidenced by a clip from a movie (usually a recent Hollywood release) were reflected upon to identify the ways they related to scripture. The purpose of the service was to teach theological reflection by the example of the worship leaders sharing their theological reflection on the movie.<sup>66</sup> The musicians were encouraged to engage in this process as well, as they shared how and why they wrote the songs they were going to perform.

***Mystery Bag: A tool helping children reflect theologically***

An addition to the traditional worship service was a Mystery Bag for the children. Each week the empty bag was given to a child and the following week s/he would bring an object of her/his choice to the service and the object in the bag would be the focus of the children's message. The worship leader was challenged to think quickly about how the object could be related to some theological concept. One of the benefits of doing this was that children became engaged in the weekly time with their pastor. The lesson taught was not just the actual lesson by the worship leader; the lesson was also how to think theologically.

Although the lesson was aimed at children, the entire congregation was part of this learning experience. If the worship leader became stumped, the adults would be incorporated into the process. Over time, even the children began offering lessons from objects. The result was engaging a congregation in reflecting theologically on everyday objects in their lives.

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<sup>66</sup> For an example of this see the section entitled "Soul Café: A Media Worship Experience" in Chapter 4.

### ***Theological Training – “Living the Questions”***

The skill of theological reflection is important, but without a theological education it will lack sophistication. The congregation was invited to be part of a comprehensive theological education program called “Living the Questions.” The training was offered to all in the congregation but a special emphasis was placed on members of the Worship Planning Teams. This and other courses allowed individuals within the church to gain a high level of theological competency in a short period of time. The course is a 10-week overview of theological concepts using a Metaphoric interpretation of the Bible. In 2007, it was expanded to a 21-week course and re-titled “Living the Questions 2.0.” The course is DVD-based and includes interviews of theological and Biblical scholars. This course was offered several times and by 2007 nearly two-thirds of the worshipping community of the church had attended.

### ***Technological Training***

After the technological systems were built, skilled volunteers to run the technology and construct the graphics and videos to be used in worship were needed. A comprehensive training program was developed by a skilled lay person who helped me design and configure the system. We made several requests for volunteers to sign up for the training but found that many responded that they had no technical skill. At the initial training twelve people, six women and six men, learned how to operate cameras, microphones, the video scaler, and MediaShout computer software. Several of these individuals were also part of The Worship Planning Teams. Additional trainings occurred on a one-on-one basis as individuals indicated an interest.

Most had little or no technical training but there were some highly skilled congregants who had graphic and video design experience. They assisted in training others in graphic design and video production enabling a larger number to learn these skills. Therefore the planning group for a particular week usually contained several people with the technical skills needed to design graphics and videos, and all members would have engaged in theological education training. This cross training allowed for more egalitarian, collaborative worship development.

## **Worship Planning Team**

The most significant change at Christ Church was in the development of worship. Many Mainline denomination churches have a Worship Committee that gives feedback to a pastor about the worship services but the Worship Planning Team is very different. Christ Church's Worship Planning Team was modeled after the Worship Design Team of Ginghamburg UMC, with some intentional differences. I wanted to have a more egalitarian worship design process. Several factors had to be overcome in order to design this process: Hierarchy is encoded in staff being members of the team; the church's theology; and the ultimate control or decision-making being entrusted to one person.

As a relatively small church with a small staff meant that staff would not numerically dominate the planning team as they did at Ginghamburg. Staff were always outnumbered by lay members on the team at Christ Church. Although there are significant power differentials between clergy and lay persons, the lay person's employment does not depend on their actions or statements made in the planning process, as a staff member's does. This alleviated some of the problems.

Christ Church is a Northeast United States Liberal Mainline Church. This theological identification places a strong emphasis on diversity, inclusivity, and a rejection of oppressive power structures. Clergy still have significant power in this type of church, but their commitment to the principles of inclusivity make them intentional in their efforts to share power. This approach was exhibited in Christ Church through a distributed decision making process. I gave up the power of a clergy veto.

All of the significant decisions about worship design were decided as a group. What the group decided is what happened, even if one or some did not agree. Those design decisions would be reviewed the following week and could influence future decisions. In other words, the group committed to a shared learning and growth model that evolved over time as the implemented decisions of the group were reviewed each week.

The initial Worship Planning Teams (there were two that rotated seasonally) were selected by the two pastors although future teams were composed of individuals who volunteered to serve on the teams. Teams included men and women of various ages and socio-economic statuses.

The Worship Planning Team met weekly and included 6-7 persons. The morning team, so named because they met on Wednesday mornings, included five women and two men, who could attend at that time. This team had several women who had small children and because of this, they often selected metaphors that involved children or families. The evening team, who met on Tuesday evenings, also had five women and two men who either did not have children or whose children were grown. Only the three staff members, the two pastors and the music director, were the same as on the morning team.

I gave the group the authority to design every portion of the service. Nothing was considered to be required and every element of the service was discussed thoroughly to determine if it needed to be included. This meant that the traditional elements and flow of the worship that had been practiced at this church for decades could be completely altered.<sup>67</sup>

### ***The Planning Process Flow***

There were two pastors who rotated preaching assignments at Christ Church. I was the Senior Pastor and I preached the majority of Sundays, with the female Assistant Pastor preaching about once a month. The preacher in charge of the service that week

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<sup>67</sup> One significant change was made a few weeks into the planning process when it was concluded that the traditional “passing of the plate” where the morning offering is collected was significantly disrupting the flow of the service. We began to refer to it as the “awkward middle bit.” Although the service at this time was significantly different from the previous worship flow, this “sacred cow,” the morning offering, was a significant challenge. The team had an unspoken assumption that collecting the offering by passing a plate to each person was the only way to collect the financial offerings of the congregation. One woman had the courage to ask “why not drop it?” The immediate reaction was shock. After a long discussion, we agreed to drop passing a plate and simply place collection plates on tables near the entrances and exits of the sanctuary. We did this for several weeks and monitored the response. We informed the congregation of the change and why we felt it was needed. The response was overwhelmingly positive. We learned that a number of individuals experienced guilt when they didn’t give an offering. We learned that many of congregation gave only once a month for the whole month and felt that they were being judged by ushers when they didn’t contribute each week. We learned that visitors had previously felt obligated to contribute because many eyes were watching what they were doing. For all of these reasons we made this experiment a permanent part of our worship format.

would email his/her ideas to the group in advance. Sometimes the ideas were well constructed but needed some group input; other times the ideas were vague. In both cases, the group's task was to identify the basic components of the particular service: a "visual metaphor," a theme, and a scripture.

The weekly development of a visual metaphor was something unique to Christ Church. The use of digital display technologies each week featured a single visual image that was projected on the screens for much of the service. It was also printed on the bulletin cover and used on the website. A visual metaphor is an image that tells a story - that points to something greater - in our case, the divine. The visual metaphor was often a picture of something ordinary, which would be a visual reminder to those who attended of a connection to theological concept.

A theme, which was often articulated as a short phrase, would come from the discussion. Sometimes this surfaced before the image, sometimes it came much later. The theme would encapsulate the focus of the service and would be used as a text that was added to the visual metaphor.

The scripture chosen for the service was often chosen by the group after the theme and visual metaphor arose. Note that this is the reverse of typical worship and sermon construction which starts with a scripture and expounds on that passage. This final step often flowed out of the conversation and discussion generated in the previous steps. It is impossible to say that this is how it happened each week as it often varied depending on the conversation by the team.

After the visual metaphor, theme, and scripture were identified, the group brainstormed on music, video clips that could be constructed or used, a call to worship (often a story that described the visual metaphor or introduced the theme), and a children's message that could provide a similar message to the one the adults would experience.

### *An Example of the Worship Planning Process*<sup>68</sup>

One Wednesday morning the Worship Planning Team gathered to begin planning worship for the upcoming Sunday. We began by discussing the previous week's service. Pastor Janet, the Assistant Pastor, led the discussion. She had preached at the previous week Mother's Day service which included some additional elements because of the holiday. Some minor issues were discussed but overall the team was pleased with the implementation of the service. We then moved on to the planning of the next week's service.

The discussion turned to the paintings that had recently been added to the alley next to the church through a collaborative effort of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and the neighborhood associations of Troy. This beautification project was aimed at highlighting one of the often overlooked features of Troy, the many alleys that run through downtown. Over the years, Troy's alleys had become garbage-filled and dangerous to walk through. A significant city-wide effort had been made to clean and restore these areas but few people ventured down them because of their past knowledge of these places.

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<sup>68</sup> The following example of the planning process has not included the many "detours" in the conversation that did not yield ideas that were incorporated into the service. It may seem reading through this that process is simple and straightforward but it actually is a long process that lasts about 3 hours and yields far more discarded ideas than incorporated ideas.



**Figure 46. Up Your Alley Postcard.**

The RPI-sponsored project called “Up Your Alley” (see Figure 46) was designed to get neighborhood people into the alleys and to add painted murals to entice people to walk these pathways. Our church had encouraged people to assist in this project and some went and enjoyed the experience.

We realized that many of our own congregation had not seen these murals, as they avoided walking down the alley next to the church. In the midst of this conversation we discovered that there are many “places” in our lives that we avoid out of fear or possibly just habit. Nancy, a mother of two school-age children, related this to a scripture passage, John 21: 1-14. The passage describes a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples, who are fishing and haven’t caught anything. Jesus, though no one knows it is Jesus, appears on the shore and asks them if they have caught anything. The reply, “no.” He suggests that they throw their nets over the right side of the boat. They wonder who this is that might be offering advice to them but they throw the nets over the right side. Immediately there are so many fish in their net, they cannot pull it into the boat. Peter, one of the disciples looks over at the man on the shore again and

realizes this is not an ordinary person this is the resurrected Jesus, and he swims to shore to greet him.

From this scripture we found both our theme and visual metaphor. The theme would be “Taking a Second Look” and the visual metaphor would be a picture of the church with the alley where you can just barely see the murals in the picture (see Figure 47). The picture represented an ordinary view that each person saw as they entered the church that morning, but through the story of the mural project and sacred story of scripture, a deeper meaning is conveyed. Walter Lippmann at the genesis of photography wrote, “Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real” (Lippmann and YA Pamphlet Collection (Library of Congress) 1922).

I added the words “Taking a Second Look,” the theme for the service, and using Adobe Photoshop, added a graphic of a puzzle piece with the words “Stories of Hope” the series theme that this service was a part of. Additional team members were trained to produce text overlays.



**Figure 47. Visual Metaphor "Taking a Second Look" (Fenimore 2006).**

Next, the discussion focused on the Call to Worship. One of the planning team had taken pictures of many of the murals. We agreed to have her open the service by describing the event through words and pictures and introducing the visual metaphor (see Figure 48). Another team member had a picture that had a “hidden” image within it and offered to share with the children a message that sometimes we think we know what we see when we look at something quickly but that when we look more closely sometimes we are surprised by what we see.



**Figure 48. Mural Painting from Up Your Alley Event (Dorcas Rose 2006).**

As we discussed songs, someone mentioned “Open My Eyes, That I May See”. We reviewed the words:

Open my eyes, that I may see  
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;  
place in my hands the wonderful key  
that shall unclasp and set me free.  
Silently now I wait for thee,  
ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!<sup>69</sup>

We agreed that the words fit wonderfully and that this would be the final hymn to reinforce the message.

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<sup>69</sup> The United Methodist Hymnal, #454.

The end result of this planning process was a worship service designed by some of the people for whom it is intended. It incorporated knowledge of the community and represented their theological and ideological world-views. It reduced the pastor-people hierarchy and provides a structure for mutual and shared learning.

### **The Use of Metaphor**

The use of metaphor in Christian worship is not novel. Christian worship is filled with metaphor. In fact metaphor can be considered the primary literary device used in worship. From Jesus the “Shepherd” to Christ the “Bread of Life,” metaphors shape the way Christians understand and relate to the divine.

James Fernandez has defined metaphor as “a strategic prediction...which makes a movement and leads to performance” (Fernandez 1986). For Fernandez, metaphor is a lived strategy that has a mediating role in constructing identity. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson state, “our ordinary conceptual system...is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

The use of metaphor by all those engaged in media ministry has a common purpose of providing culturally relevant metaphors for theological concepts. The significant difference between Christ Church and all others engaged in constructing metaphors for worship is in the concept of universality. Because of the nature of constructing metaphors for mass consumption,<sup>70</sup> universality becomes a guiding assumption for the development of media. What works for Ginghamburg should work elsewhere. This would only be true if all Christians believed the same things and had the same set of experiences. Christ Church engaged in a process that valued cultural relativism (Boas 1963). Our metaphors did not necessarily result in a universal and transferable concept, but in an indigenous, strategic signifier of the divine.

At Ginghamburg the metaphor, or look, was a design or set of images that could be used to visualize the theme for the current worship service. Table 6 provides the themes and metaphors for the services of which I was present for the planning process.

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<sup>70</sup> Ginghamburg sells their metaphors on their website to other churches.

**Table 6. Themes and Metaphors at Ginghamburg.**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Metaphor</i>
<b>Purpose Driven Parenting</b>	(not decided at meeting)
<b>Close Encounters</b>	Ray of light on path
<b>Purpose Driven Models for Life</b>	Graduate & mother photo

The development of the metaphor at Ginghamburg was not the primary consideration; it was secondary to the theme which defined the central message to be communicated. The metaphor was designed to visually communicate the theme. The metaphors or images used were generic and lacked any particular connection to the worshipping community at Ginghamburg.

In contrast, the metaphors used at Christ Church often had significant relevance to the local worshipping community. The themes were general concepts that could indeed be used by other churches, but the metaphors encompassed indigenous knowledge that was either present before the worship service or imparted during the service.

**Table 7. Themes and Metaphors at Christ Church.**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Metaphor</i>
<b>We Would See Jesus</b>	Rorschach Inkblot of Jesus
<b>It's Not All About Me</b>	Puzzle Piece
<b>Every Day is New</b>	Sunrise in Troy
<b>Taking a Second Look</b>	Alley Next to Church

As an example, an Easter theme was “Every Day is New” and the metaphor was a video produced from multiple photographs of the sunrise in Troy, New York. At the beginning of the service the video was shown, and the story of the construction of the video was told. The creators had set up a video camera to capture the sunrise but were surprised when the sun rose in a different location than they had expected. The metaphor of a sun rising had one meaning, maybe even universal Christian meaning, but

the “sun rising in an unexpected place” provided a unique contextual meaning that became the primary metaphor of the worship service.

## **Conclusions**

The previous chapters have outlined the rise of media ministry from its origins in Evangelical Christianity to its spread to Mainline churches. We have seen that the use of technologies varies greatly between churches. Ginghamburg Church uses the technology to provide a generationally palatable communication medium that expresses the Evangelical message of Christianity that may be especially attractive to a younger demographic sought after and difficult to attract. Christ Church has adopted the technology in ways that move the congregation from passive consumers of a worship service to active producers of worship. To the casual observer the two worship services may seem to contain the same elements: songs (with lyrics projected), visual components (graphics and videos), and spoken word (preaching, prayers, etc.). The significant difference between the two services is the control of the production of media.

This movement from consumer to producer incorporates participatory culture and collective intelligence to empower a congregation to develop indigenous worship metaphors. The result is a context-specific worship experience embodying the inclusive values of a Mainline church with the technology adopted from Evangelical churches.

## Conclusions

Throughout these pages I have explored the rise of media ministry in American Protestant Christianity, beginning with the Protestant Reformation and coming through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Fueled by the technology of the printing press, the Reformation emphasized the biblical text as the primary source for theological doctrine and Christian practice. The leaders of the Reformation rejected the hierarchy of the church, specifically the Pope, as the authoritative source of doctrine. The use of the printing press to print Bibles in the vernacular and pamphlets promoting the Reformation spread this movement throughout Europe. The result of this was not only the Protestant Reformation, but also a significant increase in literacy, producing cultural flourishing of the Renaissance and the advances of the scientific revolution.

As Protestants flourished in the early American frontier their movements grew rapidly through revivals and camp meetings. These gatherings were religious spectacles of thousands gathering to listen to the words of the fiery preachers who extolled the virtues of Christianity. Referred to as the Great Awakenings, these revivals throughout early America led to the rise of the Mainline denominations (the largest being Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mainline denominations were fractured by the rise of Fundamentalism. Reacting to the rise of modernism and secularism, Fundamentalists sought a return to basic Fundamentals of faith including a literal interpretation of the Bible. The Fundamentalists rejected modernism and developed a separate sub-culture of schools, churches and even businesses.

The rise of Fundamentalism sparked a new Evangelical movement that emerged from the Mainline churches. The Evangelicals (of which Fundamentalists were part) stressed a literal interpretation of the Bible and developed megachurches, reminiscent of the camp meetings of decades before.

Evangelicals adopted new communications technologies as rapidly as they were developed. By 1960 some Evangelicals adopted television cameras and broadcast technologies. These “televangelists” could reach more people than they could possibly gather even in their megachurches.

Ginghamsburg Church, an Evangelical church in 1995, was one of the first churches to add video projection to its worship services. They used the equipment to project a live image of the preacher on the screen, completely in keeping with the evangelical emphasis on charismatic preachers. In addition, they began adding graphic elements to their worship experience. Capitalizing on the increased affordability of video projection technology and advances in computer video technologies, Ginghamsburg developed a technologically-mediated worship experience. Though it adheres to a literal interpretation of the bible, it developed a metaphoric worship presentation style involving graphics and videos.

The design of the worship was constructed by a team of the staff of the church. The need to coordinate graphic and video production, sound, music and the message required weekly meetings integrating all elements of the experience. Although involving a team, the preacher retained control and position at the top of the hierarchy.

Ginghamsburg was one of the first to adopt these technologies; this contributed to rapid growth in church attendance in the 1990s, leading it to attain megachurch status with 4000 congregants at five services each weekend. In addition, the celebrity-preacher status of Michael Slaughter played a significant role in the growth of the church. These two things are related for the technology was used to create and enhance his celebrity. Ginghamsburg, like so many other Evangelical megachurches, is formed around a single personality, the pastor. Ginghamsburg has perpetuated its worship design methodology and use of digital display technologies through national training seminars and through the online sale of digital media content.

Promise Keepers, an Evangelical parachurch men's organization rooted in Pentecostalism, also had a significant role in the proliferation of media ministry. Combining a patriarchal message – the need for men to reclaim the church – with a technological spectacle paralleling a rock concert or sports event, Promise Keepers promulgated a technologically-mediated worship style that was in turn adopted by many churches in the US.

Mainline churches suffering a decline in membership over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sought a solution to reverse the decline. Many of these churches adopted digital display technologies from the Evangelical churches in hopes of stemming the

decline and attracting new, younger members to their churches. However, the technological fix of adopting of these technologies has not worked. One reason perhaps is because they rarely changed their traditional worship style from a text-rich liturgical worship experience.

Some Mainline churches adopted both the digital display technologies and media content of the Evangelical churches as they purchased visual elements from churches or businesses that produce this content. The use of this media content produces a theological and ideological incongruity, as we saw in Chapter 4.

I propose that Mainline churches should abandon the technological fix and adopt a socio-technological fix like that tried at Christ Church. There I attempted to develop a solution fix to problems by using an egalitarian approach to worship design that respects the social principle of equality of all. The worship design process of Christ Church sought to level hierarchy in the design process. It elevated “laity” from consumers of a worship service to co-producers of the service. The initial results were promising as the church increased its worship attendance by 15% in the three years following the addition of these technologies and planning methodology.<sup>71</sup>

The socio-technological fix employed by Christ Church disrupted the boundary between lay and expert knowledge. Worship development moved from clergy-planned (expert) to an egalitarian process involving both clergy and lay. This boundary shift of expertise is similar to the need for “citizen experts” to include all the stakeholders in the process of developing environmental policy (Fischer 2000). The tension between professional expertise and democratic process is not limited to environmental policy. Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) seek the inclusion of “ordinary citizens” in the development of public policy. In Chapter 4 the conflict that arose over the incongruity of theology and projected visuals illustrates that same tension. Other examples of processes to mitigate this tension include deliberative democracy (Hamlett 2003) and participatory public inquiry (Fischer 1999), movements that seek to enhance participation in decision making.

The need for a participatory worship design process is simply stated – artifacts do have politics (Winner 1980; Winner 1986). The digital display technologies used in

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<sup>71</sup> From the United Methodist statistical reports of 2008.

worship do not inherently have politics. Rather, it is by the “arrangement” of these technologies, their use and control, that the politics are realized (Winner 1986). This study has explored the arrangement of these technologies at Ginghamburg Church, Promise Keepers, First Church and Christ Church. The critique concerns not the quality of the visual design but the arrangements of power in the production and use of these artifacts.

Science and Technology Studies has relied on social constructivism’s descriptive analysis of the development of technological artifacts. Following the work of activist scholars (Winner 1992; Martin 1996; Hamlett 2003), I am suggesting a need to re-orient Technology Studies, from descriptive to prescriptive. This study has sought the prescriptive approach to technological adoption and production.

### **For Further Study**

There is a need for additional research to focus on race and media ministry. During my research in 2004 I studied one predominately African-American church. Calvary Cathedral of Praise (Brooklyn, NY) is a Pentecostal church using video cameras for Image Magnification (IMAG) only. The worship presentation style is not metaphoric and the use of technology is nominal. Study should be focused on why predominately African-American churches have not engaged in media ministry.

In the magazine *Technologies for Worship* people of color were rarely represented in the advertisements. Table 8 provides a content analysis of the same ads studied in Chapter 5 for inclusion of women. Out of 558 ads in 11 issues of the magazine only 12 persons of color were represented in those ads.

**Table 8. People of Color in *Technologies for Worship* Magazine Ads.**

<i>Issue of TFW</i>	<i>People of Color in Ads</i>	<i>Total number of Ads</i>
<b>January 2000</b>	0	<b>38</b>
<b>March 2000</b>	0	<b>43</b>
<b>May 2000</b>	0	<b>43</b>
<b>July 2000</b>	2	<b>60</b>

<b>Sept. 2000</b>	0	<b>54</b>
<b>January 2001</b>	3	<b>40</b>
<b>March 2001</b>	2	<b>52</b>
<b>May 2001</b>	2	<b>52</b>
<b>July 2001</b>	3	<b>74</b>
<b>Sept. 2001</b>	0	<b>54</b>
<b>Nov. 2001</b>	0	<b>48</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>558</b>

Additional study should also focus on the representation of people of color in the media constructed for worship. Using the same content analysis of prefabricated graphics as in Chapter 5 it is clear that there a significant underrepresentation of people of color in the graphics sold to churches (see Table 9).

**Table 9. People of Color Represented in Prefabricated Graphics.**

<i>Company</i>	<i>People of Color</i>	<i>Total # of Graphics</i>
<b>Worship Films<sup>72</sup></b>	0	<b>20</b>
<b>Midnight Oil<sup>73</sup></b>	1	<b>30</b>
<b>Lumicon<sup>74</sup></b>	4	<b>30</b>
<b>Ginghamsburg<sup>75</sup></b>	45	<b>240</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>320</b>

<sup>72</sup> Worship Films, "Free to Worship," *Worship Backgrounds*, Vol. 3, No. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Midnight Oil Productions, *Spark*, Vol. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Lumicon Digital Productions, *Fresh Out of the Box Vols. 1, 3, 4*.

<sup>75</sup> Ginghamsburg E-Store, graphics used in worship and sold online.

## Epilogue

It has been more than ten years since I became actively involved in media ministry. When I started that journey I was pastor of Christ Church working on my Doctor of Ministry degree at Drew University Theological School. I began working on this STS degree in 2001, and began the experiment at Christ Church in 2005. In July 2006 I was appointed to the position of Albany District Superintendent in which I supervise 70 churches and over 60 pastors. I was replaced at Christ Church by a new pastor, Christ Church's first female Senior Pastor. The pastor and the worship planning team have continued to develop worship together using the digital display technologies installed in 2005.

The implementation of the socio-technological fix at Christ Church has connected the church to the wider participatory design and independent media movements. In March 2008, after Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute closed down an art exhibit on campus the controversial exhibit moved to the Sanctuary for Independent Media, a telecommunications production facility that teaches critical media literacy skills, housed in an old church building. "The Sanctuary hosts screening, production and performance facilities, training in media production and a meeting space for artists, activists and independent media makers of all kinds."<sup>76</sup> The city of Troy in turn closed the Sanctuary for Independent Media for building code violations. The Sanctuary turned to Christ Church to host upcoming exhibits while they met the requirements of the building codes.

Before the Sanctuary acquired the building they now use, they held large events at Christ Church. The combination of digital display technologies and significant seating make this a good venue for electronic art exhibits. But something else made this cooperation possible. In addition to the physical facilities at Christ Church there was also a significant commonality in understanding media and media construction. As Christ Church learned the value of empowering laity to become co-producers of visual media, they were unknowingly aligning themselves with the mission of the Sanctuary of Independent Media.

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<sup>76</sup> From the [www.thesanctuaryforindependentmedia.org](http://www.thesanctuaryforindependentmedia.org) accessed April 19, 2009.

Christ Church, like the Sanctuary for Independent Media, is an experiment in participatory design. Both are fostering ways to develop an egalitarian media production process. Science and Technology Studies has moved beyond providing the epistemological framework for analyzing technology and society. At least in some streams, notably that in the STS department at RPI, STS has adopted a more activist approach. Not only is Christ Church a case study for an STS analysis of participatory design, it is also an example of activist STS.

The reason for incorporating digital display technologies in Evangelical churches is often stated as cultural relevance. Younger generations are connected to technologies and therefore incorporating these technologies will lead to a connection with these generations. But this simplistic formula of technology yields younger generations simply doesn't bear fruit. The technological fix has not worked in Mainline churches.

Perhaps there is an alternate form or relevancy that may incorporate technology but is not just about technology. Christ Church is beginning to do this. The progressive values of Christ Church are incorporated into the worship services they are creating. If we return to Chapter 6 and the example of the worship service created using the theme "Taking a Second Look," we find a service that not only reflects progressive values but reflects the theology and ideology of the congregation of Christ Church. The service lifts up the value of community and the transformational power of neighbors working together for the improvement of the common community. The values expressed in this service might translate in other contexts, but the example used of the "Up Your Alley" program is only relevant to this context.

Relevancy is not simply the incorporation of technologies. Relevancy comes from developing a design process that allows the non-experts, "the citizen experts," the laity to be empowered to create the media that defines who they are and what they value. This is the socio-technological fix.

## Appendix A

### The Media Ministry Job Functions

(Source: *The Wired Church: Making Media Ministry* (Wilson))

When hiring a media minister, or when guiding one or more volunteers in media ministry, you should look for enough of the following skills to make a match with your church. The elements of the description below, when taken as a whole, suggest a large church structure. If your church is smaller, edit the description.

#### Creative

- ✦ Visionary: Demonstrate necessity of media in church life through excellence in production.
- ✦ Planner: Oversee electronic media content for church life, including weekly worship celebrations, education needs, church life campaigns, and broadcast advertisements.
- ✦ Advocate: Promote visual thinking in program development in all areas of church life.
- ✦ Storyteller: Compose the thoughts and visual images that will form a coherent visual story.
- ✦ Theologian: Critically evaluate the interpretive power of the visual medium, making sure to preserve the integrity of the Gospel.
- ✦ Producer: Develop scripts, draw storyboards, and plan integration of graphics and music for video features; create graphic looks for worship and education series.
- ✦ Coach: Guide media assistants in electronic media design, for 2-D, 3-D, and video.
- ✦ Continuous learner: Stay current with cultural trends in media content by watching television, film, and 2-D mass media (advertising, periodicals, etc.).

#### Administrative

- ✦ Oversee all budgeting for media ministry
- ✦ Lead all coordination of scheduling for live and production needs for worship and educational media.
- ✦ Evaluate and approve all media purchasing, from capital equipment to production needs to ongoing materials.
- ✦ Archive all media content in database form.
- ✦ Design structures for new ministry components of media, such as media content and presentation for education.
- ✦ Evaluate and determine staffing and personnel needs for media ministry.
- ✦ Determine best service arrangements for equipment maintenance, oversee all equipment upkeep.
- ✦ Promote the needs of the media ministry in church life.

## **Relationship**

- ✱ Develop leadership within the media ministry, including (at least) weekly conversations beyond technical/administrative issues with team leaders in video, sound, lighting, and tape.
- ✱ Host monthly small group meeting within the media ministry and direct social and spiritual gatherings for the ministry as a whole.
- ✱ Recruit new members into the media ministry while developing fringe participants.
- ✱ Train team members of the media ministry in relevant technical areas.
- ✱ Impart spiritual leadership and wholeness to the teams and people of the media ministry.
- ✱ Create environments where people feel part of a community.
- ✱ Provide accountability and developmental guidance for media staff teams professionally and spiritually.
- ✱ As possible, develop relationships with other media ministry professionals throughout church and with secular media industry professionals.

## **Technical/Production**

- ✱ Oversee operation of in-house computer systems, all computer systems related to education/presentation, all production and live video operations, and all live and production sound, lighting, and tape for weekly worship celebrations and education needs.
- ✱ Power-user on a variety of software programs; know processes and means to create desired media out-comes for video and graphic applications; for more intense software programs such as video compositing and 3-D rendering this requires a continuous learning curve.
- ✱ Coach and develop assistants in specific technical areas for purpose of content creation.
- ✱ Know setup and operation for laptop and desktop computers for presentation use, including configuration into video systems.
- ✱ Location video operation: Operate broadcast cameras and related field equipment, including field lighting, battery maintenance and optimization, field audio for video, and recording decks(s).
- ✱ Various off-line video editing functions, including logging all footage, refining script, picking shots, using time code from logs.
- ✱ Various on-line video editing functions, including digitizing all footage, creative graphics in video compositing software, importing music, compiling all together in video editing system, “sweetening” audio, creating effects.
- ✱ Must know how to set up and operate basic sound and lighting configurations; must know technical specifications for how amplified sound works and how to troubleshoot potential problem areas.
- ✱ Decision maker on issues regarding the technical management of video, sound, lighting, and tape duplication.
- ✱ Troubleshooting on all video and computer graphic production and presentation equipment.
- ✱ In-house expert for anything technical!

## Appendix B

### The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper

1. A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises.
3. A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.
4. A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection and biblical values.
5. A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources.
6. A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.
7. A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (see Mark 12:30-31) and the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19-20 ).

*Mark* *12:30-31*  
*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. (NIV)*

*Matthew* *28:19-20*  
*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (NIV)*

## **Appendix C**

### **Marketing Worship**

Churches equipped with projectors screens and the hardware and software to run a multimedia “show” needed media. Backgrounds for slides with song lyrics, videos with a “purposeful message,” and media that filled the screen were needed each and every week services were held. For the early adopters of this technology, there was a need for content.

Some larger churches like Ginghamburg hired graphic artists and video production specialists to develop their content, but few churches could afford the high salaries needed to attract quality technologists.

In the late 1990s there were very few businesses providing media content for worship services. Churches like Ginghamburg UMC, Community Church of Joy (Glendale, Arizona), Highway Church (Mountain View, California) and Fellowship Church (Grapevine, Texas) sold their professionally-produced graphics and videos to other churches. These large churches with staff employed to design and create custom graphics for their church community discovered that other smaller churches were in desperate need of quality graphic materials, and by selling these custom graphics, they could recoup some of the costs associated with the development of these graphics.

With the media content market being dominated by churches selling their customized graphics and video, the issue of translatability became apparent. All the churches that produced and sold graphics and videos in the late 1990s were Evangelical churches. Therefore a church that used a metaphoric approach to Biblical interpretation was left with a difficult choice: Either develop custom graphics and videos (expensive and time-consuming) or use media content that communicated a potentially unacceptable theology.

#### **Media Production Businesses and Media Producers**

The earliest media producers had common connections. The metaphoric connection (see Figure 49) visually depicts these connections between each of these individuals and companies. What follows is a brief historical outline of each of these businesses and leading figures in the development of visual media.

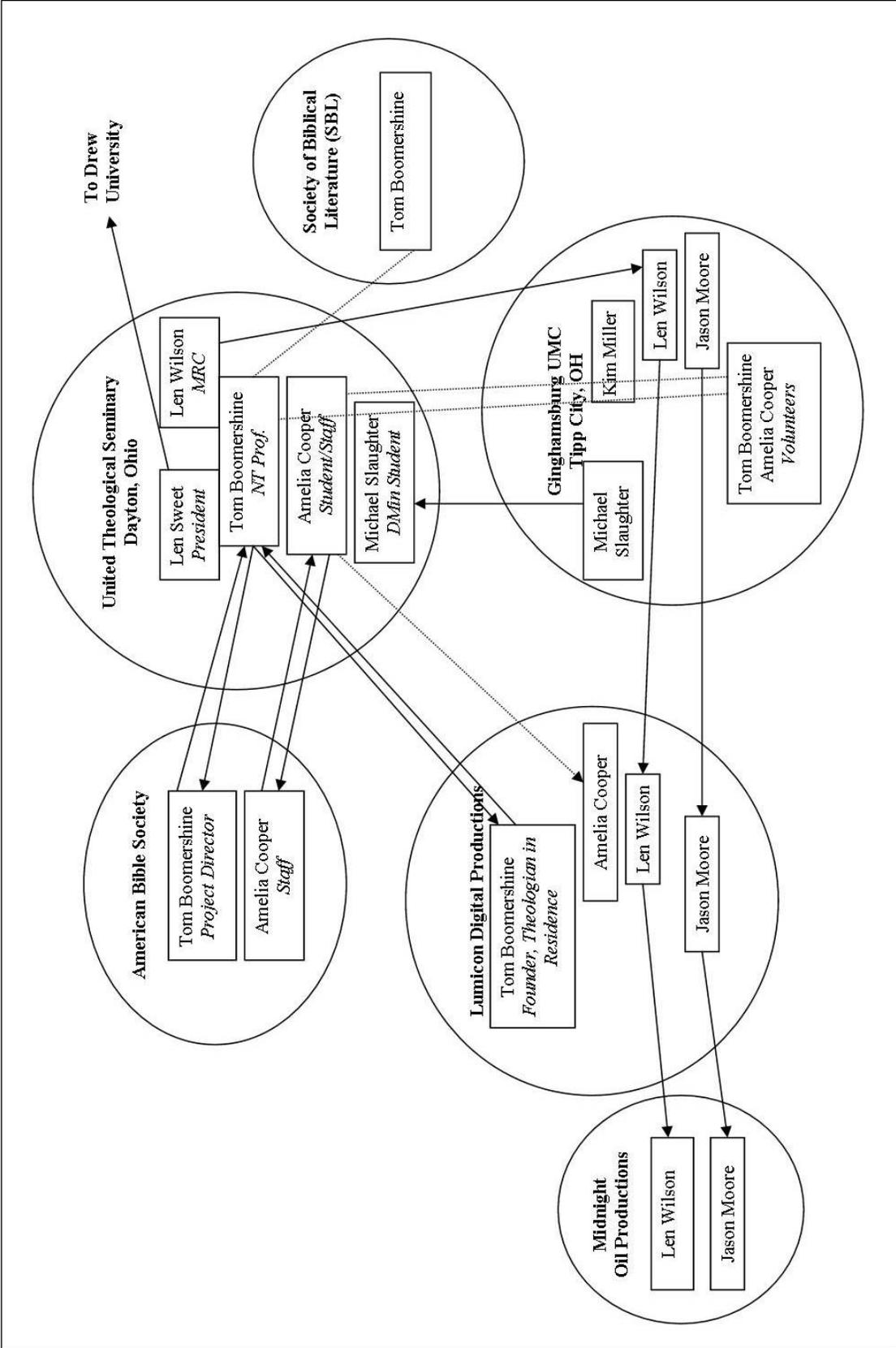


Figure 49. The Metaphoric Connection.

## **Tom Boomershine**

The UM Reporter hired Tom Boomershine, a New Testament professor at United Theological Seminary (Dayton, Ohio) in 2000, to lead a team to develop media resources for churches. Tom played a significant role in the development of Lumicon and in the promotion of media ministry.

Boomershine was an inner-city pastor in the mid-1960s where he became interested in trying to communicate the gospel to teenagers. He came to the conclusion that “interpretation was determined by hermeneutics that had been developed for a print culture.”<sup>77</sup> His interest was to seek to interpret the Biblical stories as an oral culture narrative.

He dedicated much of his early work to establishing a network of Biblical storytellers which he did through the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). He began teaching at United Theological Seminary in the 1970s because he “was convinced that somebody in the liberal community needed to get involved in television.”<sup>78</sup> He believed that the conservative churches had monopolized this rapidly growing medium and that the liberal Mainline churches were being left out of this extraordinary opportunity. At United he developed a research emphasis in communication that led to involvement in several interesting institutional projects but few publications (Boomershine 1987; Boomershine 1987; Boomershine 1987; Boomershine 1988; Boomershine 1989; Boomershine 1990; Boomershine 1991).

In the early 1990s Boomershine<sup>79</sup> was the Executive Producer of a series of videos based on scripture narratives. The project was part of the work of the American Bible Society (ABS). The goal was the development of a video Bible in which scripture passages were reinterpreted and told in contemporary language through multimedia. Each video incorporated different musical genres as well. From country to techno, the music reflected the diversity of interpretations of the stories of Jesus in the Bible.

The ABS project was short lived as budget constraints and poor sales canceled the project. Boomershine points to poor distribution on the part of ABS as the reason why sales were so bad. A number of complaints were received from conservative

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Tom Boomershine, June 19, 2004.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Tom Boomershine, June 19, 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Along with his wife Amelia Cooper also a theologian.

groups about one particular video produced by Boomershine. The video, “Out of the Tombs,” (1992) portrayed a man possessed by many demons. This video received some negative reviews by conservative writers. ABS, which relies heavily on a conservative market backed off widely distributing the product and soon after cancelled the project.<sup>80</sup> In the early 1990s, Boomershine and his wife, Amelia Cooper, volunteered as part of the technical crew at Ginghamburg. Boomershine was connected to the church by two former students. Len Wilson, Media Minister at Ginghamburg, was a graduate of the communication program at United Theological Seminary that included Boomershine and Michael Slaughter, Lead Pastor, was a Doctor of Ministry graduate from United.

This “cross-pollination” between Ginghamburg and United Theological Seminary makes it difficult to determine whom should be credited with what in the development of one of the first media ministries. What is clear is that Tom Boomershine seems to have been a key figure as he connects a number of important institutions or businesses (see Figure 49).

### **Lumicon Digital Productions**

The CEO of UM Reporter hired Boomershine and his wife Amelia Cooper to provide the theological expertise for a team to build “worship experiences.” Boomershine needed graphic and visual artists to design the materials and he suggested Len Wilson and Jason Moore of Ginghamburg UMC. A secret interview was setup with the CEO of UM Reporter flying into Dayton and watching the Ginghamburg worship service. He then interviewed Wilson and Moore and before long both agreed to leave Ginghamburg for Lumicon, based in Dallas, Texas.

Lumicon did not design worship for any particular church. Their mission instead was to produce flexible and customizable graphics, animations and videos as well as documenting and outlining ways they could be used in worship experiences, with additional ideas for movie clips or other enhancements to the service.

Boomershine describes the process employed to build the worship experiences:

We developed a team process in which everyone had to agree on an image. I brought to that a set of criteria that I gradually became clearer about. I would measure things by congruence with the overall impact of

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Tom Boomershine, June 19, 2004.

the meaning of the story, and its original context, in its image world. And then to try think about to identify what will happen to this image in the digital world – a critical process. And what other images is it associated with in the culture. What’s the impact of the image? What is it for particular groups? What is it for the large group? There are a whole series of complex political considerations because they are so free-floating in relation to meaning. And it is difficult to control the meaning of an image.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to this process, the composition of the group became important. Each individual held an important role based on his or her identity. The diversity of the group was necessary to reach a broader audience. Diversity in theological perspective, gender, ethnicity and age were of primary concern, although they were never able to include any persons of color in the team planning process.

Lumicon required a substantial investment to begin. It was months before the first products were ready for shipment and sales were very slow. The pricing structure was unique and may have contributed to slow sales. Churches purchased annual subscriptions that depended on how much media they wanted to use each week. These subscriptions were costly and required churches to use the Lumicon materials almost every week of the year, rather than allow them to pick and chose and buy which weeks they wanted.

Boomershine and the team agreed to develop resources for the three-year lectionary cycle of readings. The Lectionary, a prescribed set of texts that repeats every three years , is used by most Mainline denomination churches. By the time these three years of materials were produced the team fell apart with Wilson and Moore leaving to start their own company and Boomershine and Cooper leaving shortly after.

### **Midnight Oil Productions**

Len Wilson and Jason Moore started their own company called Midnight Oil Productions in 2002. They had been thinking about this even before their time at Lumicon. They continued to develop materials for worship services but use a very different pricing structure. They sell DVDs of 40+ graphics and companion DVDs of 10

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Tom Boomershine, June 19, 2004.

videos based on 10 of the graphics packages. In addition, individual packages can be purchased via download.

A great deal of sales, and additional revenue, is generated from training sessions throughout the country. Wilson and Moore train individuals in using these products, and more importantly, customizing them to a church's needs.<sup>82</sup>

### **Len Wilson**

Most Media Ministers studied have a technical background and experience in graphic design, video production, desktop publishing, or general information technology. I only know of one who has also had theological training, Len Wilson. Although his work at Ginghamburg UMC, Lumicon and Midnight Oil has been documented above, I want to focus on his unique background that made him one of the first Media Ministers.

Len Wilson was born a preacher's kid, a distinction that provides him with a different perspective than his peers. He claims that church bored him.<sup>83</sup> Growing up, his two great loves were writing stories and working with computers, passions that he continues today in a different form.

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<sup>82</sup> Lumicon provided some training and sought to develop the Lumicon Institute that provided training a credentialing to those working in the field of media ministry. This was one of the first things cut by UM Reporter and funds became scarce.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Len Wilson, June 18, 2004.



**Figure 50. Some of the Leaders in Media Ministry (from left Jason Moore, Len Wilson, Tim Eason) (S. Fenimore 2004).**

He studied communications at a small Methodist liberal arts school and graduated in 1992. He planned to go to graduate school and considered several. He began attending the Annenberg School of Communication, part of the University of Pennsylvania. After a year there he realized that his course of study was not working well. The school was built on the “broadcast model” and no one understood what he hoped to do. No one “had a kind of macro view about how the church could use communication.”<sup>84</sup>

Wilson heard about a program in communications at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. He visited the school and met with Tom Boomershine and the school’s president, Len Sweet. They convinced him to transfer into the Master of Arts in Religious Communication program at United. But even there Len found them to have a “micro view” of religious communications.

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Len Wilson, June 18, 2004.

At United he used a traditional SVHS AB Editing System. This linear editing system is basically two VHS decks connected together with an A-B switch and linked to a third deck that recorded a master. Wilson did freelance work in addition to the work at the school, and was able to learn to use a non-linear editing system in that setting.

Wilson graduated from United in 1995 and learned from someone at United that Ginghamburg was looking to hire someone with media expertise. He applied and became Ginghamburg's first Media Minister.

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