



Connecting Through Technology

Some people think that technology and social media, in particular, are harmful to relationships. There is good reason to think so. Most people show the best part of their lives on social media. Every day appears to be wonderful and full of excitement. You might begin comparing your life to the lives of your friends as you scroll through your feed. Your life looks very ordinary, maybe even boring compared to theirs. What you do not realize is that their lives are just as ordinary as yours!

By Carolyn Hipkins

Some people are mean and hateful on the Internet. They write things they most likely would never say in person. And most of us have heard horror stories of people who had terrible things done to them by someone they met on the Internet.

Sometimes, the Internet is a dangerous place. But with proper use, the right mindset, and a healthy amount of caution, the Internet is a good tool to enhance and develop relationships.

Social media has helped me reconnect with some of my high school classmates. I have become friends with them on Facebook. We share life events such as marriages, anniversaries, graduations and retirements. If we have information about other classmates, we will share that also. Sometimes we have deep conversations about things that happened in our lives. I have attended two high school reunions. I was able to enjoy meaningful real-life interactions with classmates I had not seen in years because of the sharing we had done on Facebook.

First Baptist Church of Glenarden is using social media to help members and friends connect with one another. FBCG has an official Facebook group. A Facebook group is a space for members to communicate about shared interests. The purpose of FBCG's Facebook group is to build an online community where members and friends can connect and grow together. One of the ways members connect is through a post that asks for prayer requests. A post is a communication seen on the Facebook "wall" or feed. The post asks members to list their prayer requests. Social Media Ministry members respond with a prayer in the comments. The group members also pray for one another.

I was able to connect with someone that I had prayed for online. I met her at the women's retreat in May. While talking to her I found out that she is related to one of the ministers at FBCG. A connection that was formed online continued to develop in person.

The noon Sunday service, evening Communion service, and Tuesday night Bible study stream live on

Facebook. Hosted by members of the Social Media Ministry, the stream consists of a live video feed and real-time commenting, or "chatting." The hosts interact with the live stream worshipers and monitor the chat to make sure comments are appropriate and the environment is welcoming.

The Facebook live stream worshipers have become a community. They greet each other as well as the FBCG hosts. If someone is new to the live stream, they are welcomed by the hosts and worshipers, similar to how first-time visitors are welcomed during worship services. Participants are quick to pray for someone who expresses a need. A couple of them have become unofficial FBCG prayer warriors. FBCG is not just on Facebook. We also have accounts on Twitter and Instagram. Twitter works a lot like a real-time chat. People post short messages

about a variety of topics.

Instagram is similar except it is more image-based. Through both accounts, the church connects with people by posting Scriptures, prayers and inspirational quotes from the weekly sermons. During the recent government shutdown, prayers for the government and the people affected were posted. The response was tremendous; many took some comfort in knowing that their

church cared and was concerned about them. Of course, we also ensured that everyone impacted received information about the food giveaway that FBCG hosted.

While it is true that technology and social media are sometimes dangerous and used for negative purposes, technology can also be used for good. It can be used as a tool to develop and enhance relationships, both online and in real life. It is a method to communicate and provide information, as well as to comfort and encourage people. Utilized in conjunction with regular attendance at worship service and Bible study, technology helps to strengthen our spiritual life and relationship with God. So whether you prefer Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, you can connect meaningfully with others through technology.

Sometimes, the Internet is a dangerous place. But with proper use, the right mindset, and a healthy amount of caution, the Internet is a good tool to enhance and develop relationships.