

C H R I S F O R B E S



# Facebook *for* PASTORS

HOW TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND  
CONNECT WITH PEOPLE USING THE MOST  
POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORK ON THE INTERNET.



## **Facebook for Pastors** **By Chris Forbes**

Chris Forbes is the founder of Ministry Marketing Coach. He speaks and writes on the subjects of ministry marketing, faith-based nonprofit marketing, social marketing, and Guerrilla Marketing for nonprofits.

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Published by Chris Forbes  
[Ministry Marketing Coach](#)  
Tel: (405) 570-4566  
[chris@ministrymarketingcoach.com](mailto:chris@ministrymarketingcoach.com)

## Dedication and Acknowledgements

This e-book is the collaborative effort of so many people that I have lain awake at night fearing I would forget someone who has helped. If I happen to forget you, please forgive me! I have had so much fun putting this project together with you! I could not have done it without more than a little help from my friends. What started out as a simple series of blog posts has turned into a handy guide for launching an effective Facebook ministry, thanks to you.

To God be the glory! Thanks to my wife Angela and three daughters Hannah, Sarah, and Rebekah, who make my life a joy and endure me working from home! Thanks to [Rick Presley](#) for his extra-mile attitude and encouragement in shaping and tweaking the manuscript. [David Gagné](#) the design coach at [MinistryMarketingCoach.com](#) is always there to make me look good with the graphics in the e-book. Thanks also go to the helpful suggestions and networking done on behalf of this project to my new Facebook friend Cynthia Ware. Greg Atkinson wrote an excellent foreward. I look forward to the release of his new book! Aaron Lee helped compile the testimonies from the Facebook for Pastors group. Thanks to all the people from the group who have sent ideas, comments, wall posts, and their stories of how they use Facebook in ministry. Neil Cox has been a faithful encourager to all people who use the internet in ministry including me.

Most of all thanks for all you do, Ken Surritte, for the children at risk all around the world. This book is dedicated to your kids! May they sleep tonight in a warm, safe place with full stomachs thanks to all the people who will support Hearts and Hands International now that they are aware of your work.

## About Hearts and Hands International

If you find this book helpful, consider making a \$10 donation to the children's charity Hearts and Hands International in honor of the children of Africa, India and China to whom this e-book is dedicated. [Hearts and Hands International](#) is a non-profit organization founded to help children at risk. Helping over 2,500 orphans worldwide, this organization supports 10 orphanages located in Africa, India, Brazil and China. Heart and Hands goal for the year is to double the number of children that they help.



**Click here to make a  
\$10 donation  
to the children's charity  
Hearts and Hands International**

This endeavor, now in its fourth year, has seen many relationships develop both domestically and internationally. It has forged partnerships with people from many backgrounds with kindred hearts for the mission and those with business and industrial capabilities who have opened their hearts to meet the needs of children at risk. Hearts and Hands International, Inc. is committed to involving people in hands-on ministry. Their purpose statement says they are, "making a difference, one life at a time."



Ken Surritte and his wife Nita founded Hearts and Hands International. They have traveled the world meeting the needs of children at risk and have also been involved in disaster recovery in the United States. Mr. Surritte has also been involved in disaster recovery in the United States, participating in the relief efforts from hurricanes; Ivan, Jean, Francis, Katrina, Rita and Wilma. During the clean up from hurricane Katrina, his team was responsible for over 22,000 families being returned to their homes.

[www.HeartsandHandsInternational.org](http://www.HeartsandHandsInternational.org)

*"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:2, NIV)*

## Foreward

By Greg Atkinson

I believe all pastors should be on Facebook. I know that's a bold statement, so let me give some background on how I arrived at this conclusion. Compared to a lot of people, I was a late-comer to Facebook. I have nothing against Web 2.0 applications and was a member on web sites such as MySpace and LinkedIn because I thought they were more for grown-ups and professionals. I had heard of Facebook, but thought it was just a social-networking site for college students. Boy was I wrong!

How did I become a member of Facebook? I read a compelling blog post by my friend, [Bobby Gruenewald](#), who is the Innovation Pastor at [LifeChurch.tv](#). On his blog, [Swerve](#), Bobby did a 3-part post entitled "What's All This Hype about Facebook?" You can search his blog for this title and read it yourself. I recommend it if you are skeptical about Facebook like I was. Once I read it, I dove into the wonderful world of Facebook and Bobby became my first "Facebook friend".

Fast forward half a year and here I am making a bold statement and writing this Foreword. The past several months that I've been a part of the Facebook community have been amazing. I've been able to meet several new friends (yes, I'd consider them friends – not best friends, but friends none-the-less), learn about other churches and ministries where God is at work and network like never before. I've always been a networker and love to meet people on staff at other churches, but this is networking on steroids. You come across someone you know and get introduced to someone they know. You become a Facebook friend with that person and then get to know who they know. On and on from there, next thing you know, you're connected to hundreds or thousands of people.

### **Here are some reasons why I made such a bold statement at the beginning.**

*Being a member of Facebook allows you to be accessible to others.* By putting my profile out there for all to see, lots of people can see me, find out about me, message me, and strike up a conversation with me. I've met countless people who have sent me a "friend request" and have now become people that I e-mail regularly or "write on their wall" (it's a Facebook feature). I've also met people online via Facebook, set up a real meeting face-to-face, and gotten to know them in person.

*Being a member of Facebook is in line with a Kingdom-focus.* As I said, I've always been a networker and enjoyed meeting people from other church staff. Through Facebook, I've been able to share ideas, resources and encouragement with other Church leaders, as well as receive it. Through the various features and applications on Facebook, I am able to hear what God is doing at another church. People are able to see the global Church in action, rejoicing with those who rejoice and crying with those who cry. We're in this together and the friendships and associations that come from Facebook reinforce this.

**Facebook is the social network for connecting with people online. We have had great success using Facebook to connect with people from around the world. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to point people to Jesus who otherwise I would not be able to.**

*Pastor Mark Driscoll  
Mars Hill Church, Seattle  
[www.marshallchurch.org](http://www.marshallchurch.org)*

*Being a member of Facebook shows that we're all human.* Through Facebook's "Status Updates" I am able to see someone's mood, hear what they're up to and get to see behind the curtain. I tell them what I'm up to. If I'm reading, watching a movie or ball game, playing with my kids, going on a date with my wife, etc. For Senior Pastors this is especially beneficial for breaking down the wall between clergy and laity. I think it's healthy for one of your congregation members to see you're "cutting the grass," "raking leaves," "going to a football game with your son," "watching a movie with your spouse," etc. All these status updates can seem silly, but are a sneak peek into your everyday life. They show people that you're down-to-earth, that you have likes, dislikes, hobbies, and on and on. It's like running into your grade school teacher in the grocery store when you were a kid and being surprised to see them out of their classroom.

*Being a member of Facebook gives others a look at your heart and passions.* People can find out more about you by what groups you join, what causes you support, what books you're reading, what movies you like – all the various applications that Facebook offers, which again give others a sneak peek into what makes you tick and what drives you. One glance at my groups and you can see that I'm very interested and passionate about media and technology.

**Facebook has enormous potential for ministry leaders. Not only can they use it to network and learn from each other, but Facebook can also be used to extend the boundaries of traditional ministry. Instead of being restricted by a set time and place, ministries can now engage people regardless of one's schedule or location.**

*Kent Shaffer  
Owner, Bombay Creative  
Founder, ChurchRelevance.com*

*Being a member of Facebook encourages learning, sharing and discussion.* Once you become a member of a group, you're able to post discussion topics and questions and then begin what I call a "collaborative conversation" in my upcoming book, Church 2.0. In my book, I put forth the idea that "Church 2.0" leaders share and learn from each other. It's what Nelson Searcy of The Journey Church in New York calls "learn and return." In my book, Nelson says, "Leaders of Church 2.0's are quick to give back what they are learning - this 'learn and return' idea of generosity is a driving force behind what we do at The Journey." I've watched people post topics and issues that they were dealing with or wrestling with and seen others dive in to help out and share what they've done in their ministry. It's truly a beautiful thing to behold.

*Facebook is another door into your local church.* Believe it or not, there are people that came across a church first on Facebook and then visited the

church in person. I don't need to tell you that millions of people are on social networking web sites like Facebook and MySpace. When someone is searching for a relevant ministry in their city and comes across your church's Facebook group or one of your pastor's profiles, this gives them a positive first impression and allows them to get to know your DNA before they step foot in your building and in many cases, before they browse your church's web site.

These are just a few thoughts from my heart. This is by no means an exhaustive list. I'm sure you'll hear more reasons for being on Facebook from the stories contained in this book. I simply wanted to introduce the topic to you and get your wheels turning. Please read ahead with an open mind

and open heart. Who knows? Maybe 6 months from now you'll find yourself making the same bold statement!

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Greg Atkinson lives in Dallas with his wife and their three small children. Greg served previously as the Director of [WorshipHouse Media](#), after having served as a worship pastor for 11 years. Greg is now the Technical Arts Director at [Bent Tree Bible Fellowship](#) and continues to consult, teach and write about worship, media and creative communication. You can connect with him through his daily blog, [Church Video Ideas](#), his podcast, [Creative Synergy](#) , or his email: [greg@churchvideoideas.com](mailto:greg@churchvideoideas.com).

## Facebook: It's not a waste of time!

Jesus was usually found where people were in the New Testament. He gave quality time to rich young rulers, religious leaders, and more. But he also made time for people on the fringe of society, people who were heretics, publicans, tax collectors, etc. Matthew recalls, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36, NIV). I wonder if Jesus would have a Facebook profile.

We can't say if Jesus would or not, but Facebook is where people are. I have spent the last few months thinking about social media and how it can be used in ministry. I have come to the conclusion that many pastors could benefit their ministry if they would begin to use social media, and a good place to start your "Church 2.0" ministry is Facebook.

If you are new to Facebook and social media, take a little time and familiarize yourself with it using this e-book. Launch your own Facebook experiment. You can start by joining Facebook and becoming my friend. I am not a pastor anymore, but you can get an idea about some of the things that you can do in Facebook. Here's a [link to my profile](#) to get you started.

For now, there are not many books for how to use Facebook in marketing, and none on how to use it in ministry marketing that I know of (until Greg Atkinson's book comes out, that is). Read this helpful beginner's guide on [Tech Soup](#) then head over to the [Wikipedia entry on Facebook](#) to get a little more background, but that is really only the beginning. In this e-book I won't be treating all the technical aspects of the website; I will mostly be discussing Facebook with an eye toward ministry. Other ministry leaders have also contributed to this e-book to give their perspectives.

Social media (like Facebook) are not going away any time soon. A new approach to communications has been opened up in the new media. The question is will your ministry take advantage of the opportunity for communicating the gospel? The biggest objections pastors offer for not being involved in social media is that it takes too much time. Pastors can't afford to simply "spend" time on something; the nature of their work demands that they "invest" it. Just like any other investment, it must be weighed against the potential return. In the past, the areas of highest return on investment of time and effort were found in technologies like the telephone and practices such as door-to-door visitation, but those days are gone, probably forever. As time and technology have marched on, we have moved into a "Web 2.0" world where many of the old rules no longer apply and strategies that used to work no longer yield the results they once did.

**Our Student Ministry uses Facebook to stay connected to the students in our church. It was VERY effective in inviting students to our High School Camp this summer. With the increase of adults using Facebook, I think it could be just as effective in inviting other adults to church related activities/events/services.**

**Jeff Wilson  
Elder/Pastor of Education  
Henderson Hills Baptist Church**

People are not interested in being targets of communication and church members do not want to be treated as media channels used by their Pastors as a church marketing communication outlet. Church members and the general population want real relationships and authentic conversations. The trouble is, a pastor can't hold a conversation with everyone. But with social media, ministry leaders can partner with their members and mobilize them as evangelists. What pastors don't realize, is that even without partnering with their members, this communication is going to take

place. It will happen either with them or without them, and maybe even in spite of them. Pastors have the opportunity now to become more personal in how they relate to the people they serve.

That means making time for communication. Jesus spent a great deal of time communicating with his disciples, training them and sending them out to communicate with others. Social media can serve the same purpose for the local church - communicating and equipping members to share their faith. To be successful though, ministry leaders need to build it into the way they do their work.

Here are some good books for understanding the marketing potential of social media in marketing:

- [Marketing to the Social Web](#)  
by Larry Weber
- [The New Rules of Marketing & PR](#)  
by David Meerman Scott
- [Naked Conversations](#)  
by Robert Scoble and Shel Israel
- [Blog Marketing](#)  
by Jeremy Wright

### **A few observations from these books:**

*Social Media is positioned to shape the online world for the near future.* The church needs to leverage the best the Internet has to offer for the cause of the Great Commission. This includes actively developing emerging media advocacy and evangelism strategies.

*Social media have transformed the discussion of theology and ministry in the church.* It will also shape the way the church does evangelism and advocacy because the world is now far more interconnected than it used to be. We will soon be

**Your birthday is the one day during the year that is “your day.” Facebook alerts me to my friends’ upcoming birthdays, and I can drop them a quick “Happy Birthday!” note. It is a nice feature with my personal friends, but an invaluable one with my students. What better way to show them that we care!**

**I have long enjoyed posting news articles, photos and other accolades in youth space at church, and Facebook provides a virtual space for that. I can post an article on our group page, or post photos from our latest retreat or mission trip and “tag” the students. Their friends will see the “tag” and our students will have a great conversation starter about their experience.**

*Aaron Lee  
Student Minister  
Richmond, Virginia*

in dialogue with the unreached people groups we want to reach. They will comment on our blogs, profile pages, and places on the web we haven't even thought about yet. Will we be ready for that moment when it comes? It could be the biggest Great Commission evangelism opportunity ever, coming right to your website.

*Social media are rivaling all the big-name media and changing how even professional communicators work.* There will always be professional writers, producers, and directors, but they are finding themselves competing more and more with amateur communicators. The church should lead the way in New Media, just as we led the way in Old Media - the first mass printing was of the Bible, the earliest adopters of radio were evangelists, etc. Pastors should stop waiting for the religious publishers and denominational organizations to give them permission to write. Start writing about the Good News now. With all the potential of social media like Facebook to form authentic communications and connections, it is easy to see that it is not a waste of time - it is an investment. Each time the church implemented new media strategies critics labeled them a waste of time or a passing fad. Christian radio and television are far from passing away! If the critics were wrong then, why should we think they are right now?

## Who's on Facebook?

Facebook started as a social community web site for college students. It was a tool that permitted networking among people within their schools and between different schools. This early history helped shape the current state of Facebook that reflects values important to young people and students in particular. Now that the site has expanded to include a broader base of users, media experts tell us that the audience is in a state of flux.

*"Given its roots as a college networking site, Facebook has historically shown very strong skews toward the 18-24 year old age segment," said Jack Flanagan, executive vice president of [ComScore Media Metrix](#). "However, since the decision to open registration to everyone, the site has seen visitors from all age groups flood the site. As the overall visitation to Facebook continues to grow, the demographic composition of the site will likely more closely resemble that of the total Internet audience."*

The Facebook audience is still mainly student based, but increasingly others are joining up. Now many types of professionals are using Facebook to keep in touch with their friends and contacts. [Web 2.0 Journal](#) says a full third of the Facebook users are aged 35-54. The bulk of the audience is younger adults, but as the percentage of older people using social media grows, Facebook will become a space to connect with adult church members and prospects of all ages.

Presently, users of MySpace trend a little older than Facebook users. This may be an artifact of Facebook's original demographic of college students, but I predict that with its ease of use and multitude of interesting new applications under constant development ([See Article](#)), it will soon overtake MySpace. It will eventually become the preferred social media site of adults.

Pastors often tell me they are trying to find ways to reach out to younger adults. Facebook provides the very opportunity ministry leaders are looking for. If you want to know what matters to young adults, what media and movies they prefer, what they are talking about, then you should get to know them on Facebook.

As you are prayerfully planning outreach you will have insights you couldn't gain on your own. First of all, you will stop thinking, "How can I reach the Youth in our community," and you will start thinking, "How can I reach Josh, and Cassie, and Dave, and ...". You will no longer have a "target audience" or a "demographic," but you will have individuals in mind, actual people that you will be trying to connect with. As Facebook grows and reflects more closely the entire demographic of Internet users, it will become a tool for understanding people from all age groups and even around the world.

Rick Presley teaches a young adult Sunday School class in Johnstown, Ohio and nearly every single one of his students is on Facebook. "It's a great tool for connecting with everyone through the week," Rick says. Most Sunday School teachers see their class for about an hour a week and that's it. Facebook allows him to stay in daily touch with a group of students who all attend different colleges, with a variety of daily schedules that makes it nearly impossible to get together through the week. Using the Home page view on Facebook, Rick is able to check on his class throughout the week and see who is talking to whom, what music they are listening to, and what they are doing between Sundays.

"Keeping in touch with my class is not the only advantage to using Facebook," Rick says. "My students have a lot of friends on Facebook who aren't in our class. Now I have an instant outreach tool. The most obvious are the high school students in the class below mine. By connecting with them on Facebook and adding them as friends, I've already begun developing relationships with them before they graduate into my class. And then there are the kids who don't even go to our church. By checking out my students' profiles, I already know a little bit about the friends they invite to church before they even show up."

Facebook is an ideal way for pastors to connect with church members through the week. It also strengthens relationships between church members. Savvy pastors will find ways to connect with people on Facebook who would normally never darken the door of a church on their own. For people who are new to a community, there is no better way for them to get to know their local pastor than a Facebook page from the church's web site. Most "About Us" or "Meet Our Staff" pages are fairly stiff and formal. A Facebook page provides an informal way to learn whether they share the same interests with the pastor before they even visit the church.

**If you have ever read Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point* you would recognize a guy like me in his pages. I am one of those connectors, the person who knows a lot of people and naturally meets and connects with many. So, Facebook was a natural for me. It took me a while to get on Facebook, although several college students encouraged me for some time.**

*Alvin Reid  
Associate Dean, Professor  
Southeastern Baptist  
Theological Seminary  
Wake Forest, North Carolina*

Facebook allowed me the opportunity to view first hand what's going on with my children and their Facebook friends, and it also gives me an avenue of contact with the students in our youth group – and their friends (and so on).

Through Facebook, I can see events as they unfold in their lives and develop friendships that grow in Christ when we are at church, youth events, etc. Take a look at my Facebook friends....you'll see that most of them are the kids from church. Facebook has really made a way for me to meet the kids where they are.

If I go to their school, I look like an adult. When I walk into the church, I look like an adult. Kids do not often seek out friendships with adults. But when I open my Facebook page, I'm just another Facebook friend and it's okay to be friends with me there.

Do I ever forget that I'm an adult and not just one of the gang? Never – not for a second. These precious lives have been entrusted to us as youth workers, and I see them all the same way I see my own children – not just a blessing and a treasure, but also a responsibility. God has placed me here, and I am excited to be a part of His work.

*Janet Andersen, Lay Leader  
Edmond's First Baptist Church*

## Facebook People Need ministry too!

The bottom line on Facebook is there are people connected to it. It is not a web site or an Internet product; it is a network of people. Each person in the network is someone for whom Christ gave himself. That is an important perspective for a pastor, wherever people gather, there are opportunities to minister.

You can use Facebook to learn more about your audience. People post thoughts and feelings on the site. They list their preferences for just about everything. On Facebook you will meet people who are dreaming about new things, and people who are feeling low and needing a word of encouragement.

You can always find someone to serve and there are plenty of people in need of prayer. There are many ministry opportunities for sharing the gospel too. You don't have to preach all the time, but you will find many opportunities to steer someone toward a faith in Christ and even lead someone to make a personal commitment to Him.

**Roger Sharp** is a ministry leader who is using Facebook to reach out to people. Roger has more than 1,000 Facebook friends and he manages a Facebook group called "Two Chix Apologetics" with more that 500 members. He also helps manage the blog [www.confidentchristianity.com](http://www.confidentchristianity.com). I asked Roger to share some of his thoughts and ministry experiences with Facebook.

*What made you decide to start using Facebook?  
When did you start?*

What a great question! I think back now and can't remember what life was like without Facebook.....it has become both an obsession, but a real tool for ministry. I find my spare time now consists of Facebook first and foremost, catching up with theological and philosophical books I didn't read while in Seminary, watching the latest cool YouTube video, and keeping culturally relevant

on FoxNews or CNN. To answer the question of 'why' I simply wanted to keep up with the students in my Youth Choir/Drama/Orchestra at church. Most of them were either Facebooker's (fun term) or MySpacer's. I checked out MySpace (still have an account, but not used so much) and was horrified by it's content. So, I checked out Facebook and found a relatively safe environment. I started on Facebook about November of 2006 I believe. I quickly realized that I could help my wife, Mary Jo with her studies by creating a group within Facebook appropriate to her and my fields of study.

*Have you had the opportunity to share the gospel on Facebook?*

Many times. In fact, the cut throat atheists I encounter force me to keep my theology in check and worked out in strict detail. They can spot problems in theology or philosophy better and quicker than most Christians!

*Has using Facebook helped you become closer to people you serve in ministry?*

It most definitely helps with the teenagers and college students. Their lives revolve around cyberspace much more so than anything else. ....their iPod tunes are online, their homework assignments are online, their calendars for extra-curricular events are online. They live online and Facebook knows it. The August 27, 2007 Newsweek front page article is about The Facebook Effect. It explains this phenomenon and how Mark Zuckerberg (founder of Facebook) saw this coming.

*What advice would you give to pastors who are just starting to use Facebook?*

My first bit of advice would be to be prepared to encounter the culture....this includes their carnality. Be prepared to get offended, called names, challenged, provoked, etc. Facebook (at least right now) consists of mostly college and high school aged students. We all know this is the age that knows everything. If you challenge their belief system with faulty logic or unfounded assumptions, they will let you know all about it. Have thick skin....Be as wise as serpents, but as gentle as a lamb. My second bit of advice would be to post on Facebook and not let it get in the way of personal ministry. Facebook is addictive!

My last bit of advice would be to consider the face on the Facebook box as a real person. Pray for him or her as you would anyone else in your congregation.

What a great tool for ministry...

**The group I administrate, Two Chix Apologetics, has grown to over 1,000 members from all over the world. It began as a means to dialogue with people about philosophy, theology, worldview and whatever else might come up. It has been one of the single best investments of my time and energy. In fact, ideas and dialogue have now been turned into the premise for a musical our church is premiering in April 2008. The dialogue on Two Chix involves every continent and shows just how small our world really is.**

***Roger Sharp  
Associate Pastor of Worship  
Nassau Bay Baptist Church  
Houston, TX***

At this point, let me add a word of caution. Facebook is not the place to get into religious arguments, name-calling, or other untoward behavior. As ministry leaders, our speech should always be gracious and this is never more true than online. Despite the casual nature of conversation, we should always consider that anything we say online, whether in a blog,

**Facebook provides a simple format that enables my husband, my co-author, and I to discuss hard questions about the Christian faith with people of different backgrounds from all over the world. We noticed that not many college students, or people in general, will comment on a blog site, but numerous people will post on a Facebook group that is well-administrated. We try to provide a "safe" atmosphere for discussion to take place; where ideas can be tried and criticisms can be given. We have found Facebook to be an unequaled tool in proclaiming the truth of Christianity through apologetics.**

*Mary Jo Sharp  
Two Chix Apologetics*

Facebook page, discussion group, or even a customer review on Amazon.com can be copied and spread across the internet. A simple rule of thumb is, "If you don't want it repeated, don't post it in the first place." Facebook can be a great tool, but it can also be a great snare for those who are careless in its use.

## Getting started on Facebook

So now that I have convinced you to start a Facebook page, how do you do it? The first thing you need to do is go to [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com) and create a member profile.

Setting up a profile on Facebook is easy. Once you navigate to the Facebook's home page, there is an easy-to-follow signup screen. All you have to do is follow the directions and you are ready to begin. However, it is important that you set up your profile page correctly from the start. Use your real name. The purpose of your Facebook profile is so people get to know you. Also use a real e-mail address because this is how Facebook will identify you when you log in and send you a confirmation that you are registered. And don't worry about adding your real birth date. Facebook won't display the year on your profile page unless you want to.

If you do it right, you will meet more people, make yourself easy to find, and will be more interesting to other people. If you do it wrong, no one will be able to find you. Here are some tips to help you create a profile that gets noticed and helps you reach the people you want to minister to.

## Join a network

You can join up to 200 groups and have as many as 1,500 friends per Friend List. (see [Facebook's Terms of Service](#)). Facebook only allows you to be a member of up to five different networks, so choose the networks that hold the most promise for your ministry. Networks are arranged by

Regions (location), Workplace, College, and High School. You will likely want to select your networks based on the area where you serve.

## Upload your photo!

If you create an account on Facebook and don't add a picture to your profile, Facebook will assign a big blue question mark where your photo would be. People with question marks seem to be telegraphing, "Hey, look at me, I'm clueless about Facebook!" It's called Facebook for a reason, people want to see your face.

You don't have to have a simple mug shot, you can have a crazy pose, an old photo of yourself—anything creative goes, but make it a picture that includes you and shows a little of your personality. Please, no fake identities or using celebrity photos—this isn't MySpace! Research shows that human beings are especially attuned to looking at the human face. It's the first form we recognize as infants when looking at our mothers. People love to see other people's faces. Show yours on Facebook.

## Post Your Interests

Facebook is first and foremost a social networking site for sharing and there is a lot more you have to share than just your photo. Your profile has space for you to list a broad range of interests, favorite things, background information, and anything else that someone might find interesting. A few of the categories you will find:

- Activities
- Favorite Books
- Interests
- High School
- Favorite Music
- College
- Favorite TV Shows
- Employer
- Favorite Movies
- Resume Items

Keep in mind as you write in this section that Facebook wants to help you network with people who are like you. As you list an item, Facebook creates a link that queries the database by looking for the exact term you used. It will look to see if it appears on other profiles in the network. If it finds a match, it will create a link that you can click to find others on Facebook who listed the exact same things you listed. This is a great way to meet like-minded people who could become your friends on Facebook.

To get the most out of this section, list your favorite things as key words and not as sentences. For example, instead of writing, "I love French Food!" Write, "French Food," the Facebook program will turn the term into a link that shows you all the other people who wrote French Food when you click the link. Again, instead of saying, "The NBA rocks," just write, "NBA Basketball." Experiment with the terms you use until you find the words that help you connect with the people you want to reach.

Don't be afraid to include terms related to your ministry. People today show an avid interest in nearly anything relating to spirituality. Clearly you are too, or you wouldn't be in the ministry. You can list terms such as "Spirituality" or "Religion" but those are rather broad. You might also want to include your denominational affiliation, books you've read, conferences and seminars you've attended, or other items that signal an interest in spirituality. You might be surprised at the number of folks who share your interests.

People will not be able to see your profile unless you make it public. Facebook is a public space that values your privacy. They let you to set up the level of access to your profile that you wish to grant. You can keep your profile as anonymous or as open as you like. Even better, you can select various levels of privacy for different kinds of friends, from “Top Friends” whom you designate at “Most Trusted” to casual acquaintances; you decide who has access to what on your Facebook profile. Rather than trying to explain it all here, simply go to the [Privacy page on Facebook](#) and read the details.

Personally, I have some things I allow everyone on Facebook to see, and some things only my friends can see. It’s a matter of your personal comfort level and openness. Generally, make it a practice not to put anything on Facebook (or anywhere on the Internet) you feel is too personal. That way you won’t have any unwanted mishaps.

## Tag friends on Facebook

Facebook is a place I can go to network with people. I don’t know what you think of when you use the term “networking,” but for me, it is all about helping others succeed at what they want to do. I believe this is the essential component of ministry. Networking allows me to expand the reach of my ministry, to be able to touch more lives, in greater depth, and with a longer-lasting impact. If this sums up your approach to ministry, finding friends on Facebook is going to be about finding opportunities to help others.

Helping people is the essence of ministry. It takes the focus off of self and directs it to other people. If you don’t like people, then maybe the ministry is not for you. After all, in the end, people are all we have! Planet Earth is crawling with them. Why not get to know a few people? Find out what their needs are and how you can help them achieve God’s plan for their lives. God has a way of putting the people who need your help in your path. Facebook can become one of the tools He uses to accomplish this very thing.

Helping people begins with finding the people who most need our help. The best resource I have seen on networking is an audio CD set called *How to Build a Network of Power Relationships* by Harvey Mackay. Using the principles from this set of CDs, you can expand your ministry outreach using Facebook as a means to stay in contact with people on a regular basis.

It’s not the number of friends you have on Facebook as much as it is the quality of the relationship you have with those friends. Facebook is not a contest to see how many people you can add to your friend list. Many pastors I see on Facebook have a lot of friends because they lead large groups of people. Others who are authors or popular speakers also have a large friend list. But no one wins a prize (at least none that I know of) for having the most friends. The real prize is developing and maintaining authentic relationships with people in your ministry circle.

## Finding Friends on Facebook

So how do you tag your friends on Facebook? First of all, you have to find them. There are three easy ways to do this:

*Make friends by finding them on Facebook:* You can invite people to be your friend on Facebook by looking for them or discovering them if they already have a Facebook profile. Search for people you know by name or by a network they are in, a group they belong to, or through a friend’s profile. As you will see, each person’s list of friends is a network all its own.

*Make friends by inviting them to Facebook:* What do you do if a friend is not on Facebook? You can invite them to get involved. Just go to the “Friends” tab in the top navigation on your Facebook profile, click the down arrow and select “Invite Friends.” Facebook gives you a space to add the email addresses of people you want to invite.

*Make friends through your email address book:* If that option sounds too tedious for you, you can allow Facebook to access your email addresses on popular email programs like MSN, Hotmail, Gmail, AOL, and Yahoo! Facebook will do a search of your contact list to find people who are already on Facebook as well as offer to send invitations to everyone who is not yet a member. You don’t want to invite your entire address book? Not a problem. Facebook allows you to select whom you want to invite. Don’t worry, you can’t mess it up! Worried about security? No need. The program only accesses your email addresses and names and doesn’t store the information.

Once you have friends on Facebook, you can keep in touch with them. But what if you already have their cell phone number, e-mail address, and maybe even their blog address? What makes Facebook so special? Let’s start simple. If you send an e-mail, you don’t know when the recipient is available to get it and respond. If you call someone on their cell phone, you don’t know until after you’ve dialed if you’ve interrupted something important or reached them at a good time. Using Facebook, you can see who is online right then at that moment. By clicking the “Friends” friends tab, you can use the pull-down menu, select “Online Now,” and you will see which friends have Facebook open on their computer. If you see someone you want to talk with you can drop them a message from right within Facebook.

But that is only the simplest way to see what your friends are up to. For a more in-depth look, click the “Home” tab at the top navigation bar of your profile page and you will find much more. If your friends post new pictures to Facebook, you get a notice on your home page. If a friend writes on another friend’s wall, you get notified on your home page.

Essentially, anything any of your friends do on Facebook that they allow to be seen, you’ll know about. Best of all, this road runs both ways. If you add a photo, take a quiz, join a group, review a book or movie, change your profile or do anything of significance on Facebook, the website will let your friends know. Just imagine the possibilities:

- Going to a conference? Want to know if any of your friends are going? Post in “Upcoming Events” and see if any of your friends join you.
- Do you ever have church members say, “I thought you were in your office,” even if the church bulletin has an announcement about your vacation? Set your “Status” and your Facebook friends will automatically be notified of where you are and what you are doing.
- Miss a birthday or anniversary? With Facebook, your friends’ upcoming birthdays are posted and you can even send them an e-card or gift from your home page.

Additionally, there is one more feature that sets Facebook apart. The News Feed provides you minute-by-minute updates on what your friends are doing on Facebook. You will know who changed their profile, who joined (or left) what group, who took what quiz, and a thousand other things right as they happen. Is that more information than you need? You can set your preferences for whatever level of notification you prefer. Just click the Preferences link in your

News Feed. The News Feed is the part of Facebook I use the most often. I'm sure once you get started on Facebook, you will too.

## Getting the most out of your Facebook profile

To get the most out of your Facebook profile for ministry, you have to keep it up-to-date. It's not hard to keep people coming back to your profile if you know what you are doing. If you think of Facebook as a place for keeping in touch with people in your network instead of a web site that you have to maintain, then you are more likely to use it to its fullest potential. If keeping up your Facebook profile becomes a bother or a chore that may mean you are not using it for the right reasons.

Keep in mind that Facebook was designed as a way for college kids to connect with one another and stay informed about what is going on in one another's lives. That essential purpose has not changed, even though the customer base is much broader than college students. Grandparents use Facebook to see what their grandchildren are up to. Business and ministry leaders use Facebook to connect with their colleagues across the country. And students still use it to connect with other students. If you use Facebook to connect with people you care about, you will be much more effective at reaching them.

The first thing to remember is that you are not just posting information; you are linking to networks of people through your profile. Such simple tasks as setting your status, joining groups or causes, and attending events will keep people who care about you up to date on what you are doing, how you feel, and what you are interested in. If you update your profile regularly, people will come back to visit because they see your activity on Facebook in their news feed, or because you have reached out to them in some way.

This may sound simple and obvious, even trivial. Why would anyone care what you are doing from day to day? This is the beauty of Facebook. You don't have to constantly pester people to stay in touch. You never call or visit them at an inopportune time. You never intrude into the lives of others. Instead, you are informing the people who care enough to want to know what you are doing and people who don't care to know need not visit. The reason people want to know what you are doing is so they can get to know you better. Your friends are likely to share the same interests you share. Just as valuable, people who share the same interests as you could become new friends. And don't forget that this is two-way communication. By visiting the profiles of people in your network, you can see what they are doing, how they feel, what they are interested in, and how to minister to them. Facebook allows you to keep in touch with people through the week.

As a pastor, the people in your profile will be looking for the same things from you that you gain from others—friendship and insight. Your role as a spiritual leader is to show them the best that the Word of God has to offer, show them the way to handle stress, temptation, etc, and lead by your daily example. Facebook may become a first stop for people who need to talk to you personally about important spiritual decisions or for other counseling needs. The better you maintain your profile, the more approachable you will become to these people.

Dale Carnegie is reported to have said, *"You can make more friends in two months by becoming really interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you, which is just another way of saying that the way to make a friend is to be one."*

It's worth the effort to make friends. Don't just put up a profile and ignore it, you will miss out on some of your best ministry opportunities. Take advantage of the following easy-to-use features to keep your profile updated.

## **Add content to your profile**

When you first start using Facebook, you will wonder what to do with your profile page. What do you post in your profile? What options do you have? What are you supposed to do with it? What are other people interested in? Don't worry. Facebook profile pages are designed for regular updates. Nothing you do in your Facebook profile is set in concrete. As a matter of fact, the simple act of modifying your profile, even if your change is as small as using a different profile picture or as big as adding an entirely new photo album, it will trigger interest in your page among your friends. So try something new, something different. If you don't like it, or it doesn't work for you, you can always take it down and put up something else. As you get more experience, you will find that the possibilities on Facebook really are endless. Here are a few more ways to add content to your profile.

## **Post your status update frequently**

Your profile has a space right under your name for you to place your most recent thoughts or current activities. Believe it or not, the sentences placed there are among the most read parts of Facebook. Some people leave that space blank - a serious mistake. Consider this space as the headline to your page. The first thing people want to know about you is what you are up to. Regulars on Facebook will notice that even the most mundane status ("...giving the dog a bath" or "...baking cookies") can generate some interesting discussion. If you think that sort of thing is undignified for a pastor, you could put a witty thought there, a serious one, whatever fits your personality. The space works like a passing comment in a fellowship time, it might spark a conversation.

For example, if I set my status as "Chris Forbes is having the best day of his life!" It might spark a conversation with someone wondering what's going on that makes this the best day ever. If I put "Chris Forbes is looking for a book on prayer" then I might get a few book recommendations. Or I might get someone asking about my prayer life or wondering if there was something I needed prayer for. You get the idea.

## **Upload photos and tag people**

With digital cameras coming down in price and nearly everyone's cell phone capable of taking pictures, digital photos are easy to come by. The problem with digital pictures is that they are difficult to carry around and show other people. Facebook solves that problem with an easy-to-use application that lets you upload photos from your computer to a Facebook photo album. Did you have an interesting weekend? Create a photo album on Facebook and post the photos. Recently get back from vacation? Post your vacation pictures in a Facebook album. Did you have a baptism at church you want to celebrate? Facebook is the perfect place to post a picture. Wedding? Engagement? Graduation? All can go on Facebook. But don't forget, sometimes the most interesting pictures come from the most mundane events. Dinner with the family can be an excellent source of candid pictures to share with loved ones. Even a casual walk in the park is worth posting. Creating a photo album and posting pictures is only the beginning of the fun you can have on Facebook with pictures. Here are some things you can do with your pictures once you have them in an album.

- **Add captions.** A lot of people who are new to Facebook, miss out on this important feature. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but by adding a caption to a photo you lend context to what it is you are posting. It makes the photo more meaningful. If you have a picture with people in it, add their names to the caption so everyone can get to know one another.
- **Add tags.** What is a tag? Facebook has a feature that lets you create a “hotspot” on a photo so that when someone else is viewing the photo, they can “hover” their cursor over the picture and the person’s name will pop up. Tagging people lets others know who else is in the photo. But that is not the only thing Facebook does with tags. You will notice that when you start tagging people, Facebook will open a menu of your friends so you don’t have to type in their names when you tag them. The advantage to letting Facebook create these tags from your friend list is that Facebook will notify them that they have been tagged in a photo in your album. One more feature of tagging is that you can allow other people to tag photos that you have put up. If you have a group photo and can’t remember everyone’s name, Facebook lets others add tags to “fill in the blanks.” What if someone adds a tag that you don’t want? Facebook gives you the option to accept or reject a tag that others post.
- **Add comments.** This feature is more for others who view your photos than it is for you. By enabling comments, you can let people who visit your albums add their thoughts on the picture. Many people, particularly teens, use this comment feature in photo albums to have long running conversations about pictures. Often the comments become more interesting than the photos themselves.

## Comment on other people’s wall

Another way to stay in touch is to comment on people’s wall. Perhaps you heard some good news about someone, or saw something in their news feed that makes you want to comment. The wall is intended for comments that are for public consumption. Part of the fun of Facebook is seeing what other people are saying about your friends and what you are saying about other people’s friends. Remember that the wall is public and that everyone can read it. If you have something personal you want to say, it is best to send a private message using the mail function on Facebook.

One thing to note is that the wall on your profile is a space for other people to make comments directed to you. Don’t put comments there yourself. If you want to respond to a wall post, use the “Wall to Wall” function to write on their wall. It is a breach of Facebook etiquette to write on your own wall. Does it make sense? Of course not, but that is just how Facebook works. This is yet again one more feature that harkens back to Facebook’s original use on college campuses.

## It’s okay to poke people!

Everyone’s profile has an interesting button called “Pokes.” You may be asking yourself what is a poke? A poke is like a tap on the shoulder to get someone’s attention. The idea is that you poke them, and they reply. However, poking has risen to a special activity on Facebook and people engage in “Poke Wars” and even upgrade to “Super Poke” programs which allow users to post e-cards, cartoon characters, and more. Pokes generally represent good clean fun. Before you start the poking, though, get a good sense of who your friends are and how they prefer to be contacted. Some people may prefer that you send a note when you want to exchange messages or contact someone. For Facebook regulars and most younger users, it’s okay to poke.

## Send gifts to people

Because Facebook knows your birthday, and the birthdays of all your friends, it keeps you posted on whose birthday is coming up. And what do you do on birthdays? You give gifts of course. Facebook has an application that lets you send gifts to your friends. These gifts are not real items, but graphic images of things. If it is someone's birthday, you can send them a cake or party hat to add to their profile. Even though these gifts aren't real, the money you pay for them is. Facebook takes a secure credit card payment of a nominal fee (usually \$1.00) to send a gift to someone you care about. On Facebook it isn't how much you spend, but truly the thought that counts. Don't take gift giving too seriously, though. On Facebook, it is a great way to strike up a conversation. If you have a visitor to your church, particularly if you have a young person come to youth group or a young adults class, sending them a gift tells them (along with a "Friend" invitation) that they are welcome any time and that you care enough about them to follow up on their visit.

## Post Notes

Every Facebook profile has a feature that allows you to post notes to your profile. This is a tool you can use to send messages to people who are in your network. When you post a note, the note appears in the news feed of the people who are connected to you. This is the place to put notices, messages, jokes, etc. You don't want write this kind of content on your Wall because that is the place for other people to put content on your profile. Your notes will also appear in the notes section of your friend's profiles.

To post a new note, just click "Notes" and select "Write a New Note." Your notes feature has a lot of capacity for creativity, you can format the note, add links, photos, etc. If you regularly post notes, you will find people will become regular readers of your content. If you are a pastor who has quite a few church members on Facebook, this is a good place to post your weekly column if you write one. You can also post announcements, reminders, congratulations, prayer requests, etc. You are only limited by your creativity.

## Going even deeper

Hopefully, by now you have a little experience with Facebook. You have created a profile, added some friends, added a photo album or two, tagged some pictures, given and received a few pokes and maybe even exchanged gifts. Perhaps you've written on someone's wall, updated your status, and even left some notes. Everything is a little more familiar and you've received some invitations to join groups and add applications. So what do you do now?

That is a good question that thousands of people are answering. One individual started a group on March 1, 2008 to show how an average Facebook group page could reach 100,000 people in a week. Within 48 hours he had 829 members and by March 5, he had reached his goal. Leaving the group open to see how high the count would go, he had over 300,000 members within a week and four days. The purpose of the group may have sounded trivial - after all the only thing the group did was add and count members - but it does illustrate the power of Facebook to reach a massive audience and engage people. With this kind of viral reach, what else can Facebook do? Here are some things you can add to your profile to harness the power of Facebook to connect with others.

## Getting the Most Out of Facebook Applications

I asked Pastor Scott Reavely of Portland, Oregon to comment on Facebook applications. Here is what he has to say:

*"Rachel is Belle. Which Disney Princess are you?"* In real-life, I would seriously question my masculinity if a high school girl asked me which Disney princess I most closely resembled, but on Facebook, I have gotten used to those kinds of questions. Hardly a day goes by when I don't see an unusual invitation like this. They are part of the fabric of Facebook known as "Applications."

Except for the essential elements of Facebook – a wall, mini-feed, pictures, pokes, personal information, and friends – almost everything else is an application. An application is an add-on that allows you to do something or communicate something about yourself on your profile.

Facebook officially sorts applications into 22 categories, but I would sort them by three functions: Games, Self-expression, and Utility. Many self-expressive applications include games to play with your friends. This is one of the ways applications spread throughout the Facebook world..

Games are the least useful, but most widely diverse of the applications. I play an Oregon Trail game because I live at the end of the Oregon Trail. I am responsible to shepherd 20 of my friends from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City, OR. I have friends who are Ninjas, others who are pirates, some who play poker, and some snowboarders who challenge skiers to races. Some of my friends grow digital plants, hatch eggs and build cars, and have electronic food fights, water fights and snowball fights with each other.

Most applications, even games I suppose, fit Facebook because they are additional modes of self-discovery and self-expression. Some are designed to help you and your friends figure out why you are so weird. You can add applications that asks how you compare to celebrities, or what love language you prefer. You can get quotes from *The Office*, *Princess Bride*, *the Bible* or *Oscar Wilde*. You can compare your IQ with your friends. You can give them free gifts, buy them drinks or rank them. One of my friends added a "What Hair Style Are You?" application (I didn't even look). I display a map of all the cities I've visited so my friends can see what a world traveler I am – or not.

I like more utilitarian applications. One of my favorites allows me to display photographs on Facebook from Google's Picasa program. I don't have to upload them twice, but everyone who can see my profile can also see my Picasa pictures. Superpoke is another of my favorite applications. It is like the basic "Poke" feature of Facebook on steroids. Instead of simply poking people you can send the Grinch after them at Christmas or tase them or slap them with a trout! Someone brewed me a spot o' tea when I was sick.

Some applications serve several purposes. My son uses an iLike application for music. Most people use it to express their music preferences. Others compete with their friends in "Name-That-Tune" music trivia. Yet, my son has used it to publish his original music onto his profile so everyone can enjoy it.

Facebook has over 15,000 applications, the vast majority of which have been developed by third parties. Last year, Facebook opened up the development platform to the public so that anyone could build an application. That's why so many exist.

As a result of this open-source direction, a few applications are raunchy. You can give sexy gifts,

view the babe-of-the-day, or even have sex with someone (I do not know how that works). And, to use the application on someone else's page you must download the application yourself. Be warned, but not too curious.

The ministry potential of the applications, in my opinion, is not yet very well developed. Some people display a Bible Verse for the day, or Christian quotes, but nothing that I have seen in the applications has enhanced my ministry to other people beyond poking them.

In fact, one of my 2008 goals is to create a ministry-oriented application myself. I know that because I display it to all my friends using my "Goals" application . . . I'll do it as soon as my wagon train makes it to Oregon City!

-Scott Reavely

## Post videos and links

By now you are familiar with Notes that you post to your profile and they automatically appear your friends' news feeds. Notes are not the only things you can post. You can also post links and videos. Sure, you can post URLs in your Notes, but what if you wanted people to watch a video right on their Facebook page? In that case, you use the "Posted Items" feature in Facebook. If you want to post a video from YouTube, you can add a link that will take them to the video on the YouTube site, but if you copy the text in the "Embed" box from YouTube and paste that in your Posted Items section, the videos will play right in your profile without having to jump over to YouTube. People will also be able to comment on the video in your profile without having to have a profile on YouTube.

The same goes for web site links. Use the Posted Items feature to add links to web pages you want them to visit. Facebook will even scan the page and let you select one of the images on the site to appear with the post. That way you can add the logo of the site you want them to visit to your Facebook page.

The Internet is a big place. There are so many interesting sites that a person hardly knows where to go. As a Pastor, your church members look to you for leadership and guidance on spiritual resources. Maybe you have a favorite web site for Bible study information, or a place where you track current events. Facebook allows you to share the sites you like with church members who may not know about them.

Because they trust your judgment, these links become a valuable source of helpful information. The advantage of using Facebook is that people find exactly what they are looking for. Some might want to know what your favorite blog site is, or what your take on a current news item is. Others might want to know the preachers you listen to online or the books you are currently reading and recommend. If you want to get really sophisticated, you could use a webcam to record a video teaser of your next Sunday sermon.

## Importing a Blog Feed into Facebook

By Micah Fries

*Micah Fries has a real passion for connecting pastors with technology and recently spoke at Impact2008. You can read about it in his blog at <http://www.micahfries.com>. I asked him to share his thoughts on blogging and Facebook.*

Facebook is really an amazing utility in that it not only facilitates the activity that occurs within its virtual walls, it also allows access to the world beyond its boundaries. One such area is the ability to import a blog feed into your Facebook profile. In order to utilize this function you are going to have to possess a blog. While I know this book is about using Facebook in ministry, let me just take a moment to "mount the soapbox" and plead with you to begin a blog and to use it regularly. In our technological age that is quickly being overtaken by Web 2.0 (hence the Facebook fascination), it is imperative that we speak the language of our communities. Increasingly younger generations speak through a virtual communication system and if we are not making use of all the available technology we are failing to adequately grasp the incredible communication tools being offered to us. Having preached my mini sermon let me jump over now and begin to consider using Facebook to import your blog.

In order to make use of this feature, you will need to first grab your blog's RSS feed. RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication". It is actually a subscription service made available through the Web 2.0 phenomenon. It allows a "Feed Reader" to pick up any new content that has been published through your blog. The RSS feed for my personal site looks like this: [feed://http://micahfries.com/feed/](http://micahfries.com/feed/) Once you have determined your RSS feed you will need to login to your Facebook account and look on the left hand side of the page. Below the "Search" box is a section entitled "Applications". Once you have located the applications section, look for a link entitled "Notes" and click on that link. At this point you will be inside the "Notes" application and you will notice, on the far right hand side, a link entitled "Import a blog". By clicking on this link you will be ready to import your blog into Facebook. In the center of the page, you will see a dialogue box that will ask for your blog's RSS feed. Take a moment to insert the feed into the box, check the box that asks if you have permission to acquire the RSS feed from your blog and push the button that says "Start Importing". At this point, if your attempt was successful, you will be given the option to continue. Go ahead and click continue now and the process is complete!

This nifty little feature will allow you to continue blogging but also will allow you to immediately expand your audience as each post will not only be posted on your blog, but will also automatically post on your Facebook profile. That, in turn, will increase the amount of traffic considering the thoughts you have worked so hard to author which increases your ability to connect people with the message of Christ.

Visit [Micah's Facebook page](#) to see how he puts his blog feed to work.

## Promoting Your Ministry on Facebook

Many ministry leaders look to Facebook as a means to promote their ministry events. It's true Facebook can notify people who are on the network about upcoming events, but that's only part of the story. You need to understand your audience and understand the medium before you can become effective using Facebook for promotion.

Facebook connects people who want to be engaged in authentic relationships. One of the quickest ways to lose credibility is to join the site, use all your "promotional speak" and spam out

a bunch of invitations to your events and groups. Too much promotion and not enough real networking will get people to drop you from their friends list. Before you begin promoting your events, be a good neighbor and learn what really happens on Facebook.

Pay attention to what you are learning about people through Facebook. People are very candid about their interests and dislikes on the network. You can get a lot of “guerrilla research” just mingling with the people you find on Facebook. When you understand people better, you may find that you change the kinds of ministries and events you program through your church.

## Create Events and Invite People

Once you have a good relationship with the people in your friends list, its time to share invitations to events offered by your ministry. An easy way to invite people is to create an event. All you have to do is click on the “Events” link on the left navigation bar of your profile. Then click “Create an Event.” Fill out the event details in the form provided by Facebook, add a picture to your event profile, and then invite people from your Facebook friends list. It’s just that easy. People in your friends list will also be able to invite their friends. You can create an event anyone can see, or schedule private gatherings using the event tool on Facebook.

Many young adults use Facebook to schedule a wide variety of events from casual get-togethers, study breaks, parties, and even time to chat online. They also use Facebook to schedule big events like weddings. If you use Facebook to connect with these young adults, you may find creating such events strange, but to them, it is as natural as sending a text over their cell phones.

The best feature about events is that they behave just like profile pages on Facebook. You can add photos, friends, links, wall posts, and all the other common features you would expect to see on a profile page. What this means is that you can post promotional pictures, confirm invitations to your event, let other people know who is coming and who is not, All this is in addition to the normal, Who, What, When, Where, and Contact information found in most event announcements.

## Create Groups

Another way to expand your ministry on Facebook is to create a group. Groups work for ongoing gatherings like Bible studies, work groups, or age groups such as a youth or college department. Some people even use groups as a polling tool. You can be part of only one network on Facebook, but you can join as many groups as you like. Groups can be active or relatively inactive. They can exist for a short term project or they can serve as a Facebook presence for established organizations. If this sounds incredibly broad, that’s because people in real life join a variety of groups for a variety of reasons over various lengths of time. Facebook simply reflects real life.

People join Facebook groups to show solidarity with a cause or theme. For example, you could create a group for an important cause such as AIDS awareness, or a silly group for something fun, like, “People Who are Lactose Intolerant Yet Still Eat Nachos.” Although this latter group may not be a good fit for your ministry emphasis, it illustrates how Facebook provides you with the ability start almost any group for almost any reason. That being said, the “First Baptist Church Young Single Adults Sunday School Class” may be exactly the kind of group you want to see on Facebook. Groups are handy because groups, like events and profile pages, incorporate the most useful features Facebook provides. To see some of these features just [click the group for this book](#). Facebook groups has a prominent place for you to put a description of your group in the

information section. But you also have several other useful tools. As you can see on the Facebook for Pastors Group, we have a large section for the latest news and some links in the right hand column to the discussion board. The discussion board is a valuable feature that allows anyone to set up an online discussion board to talk about topics of interest to the group. Some more features that Facebook provides for groups are:

- Photos
- Videos
- Posted Items
- Discussion Board
- Group Wall
- Invite Others

As people join your group, their profiles will appear listed in the member section. This provides every group with a built-in membership directory, complete with contact information and immediate access through messaging or feeds. You can send messages to everyone in the group or just selected members. This gives you an email newsletter tool ready for your regular updates. Best of all, Facebook represents the latest in “permission marketing.” By virtue of joining your group, members are giving you permission to contact them with information germane to the group. Within the constraints of Facebook’s social media format, groups represent the ultimate in getting your message to people who want to hear what you have to say.

There is one caution about groups, however. Because “Information Is Free” on the internet, if you don’t start a Facebook group for your church or ministry, don’t be surprised if someone else does. People enjoy associating with others of like mind and values. If they don’t find a space on the internet to do that, then they just might create one for themselves. This means that when it comes to control, you no longer have as much as you are accustomed to. If anybody can post anything on Facebook, there is nothing that stops them from starting a group around you and what you are doing. Is this good or bad? It depends. Think of Facebook groups as an informal place where folks can get together and discuss your ministry. If you’re doing good things and touching lives in a positive way, then it’s just more free publicity.

And this leads us to another very important concluding thought about Facebook in general.

### **One-way communication is over!**

I have showed you how Facebook is a great tool for pastors. You may see it as a waste of time or a pleasant technological diversion, but the fact is, Facebook is a community of people who need ministry, crave real relationships, and need the influence of the gospel and spiritual guidance from pastors. More importantly, they are going to find it, whether you are on Facebook or not. The challenge for you is to answer the question of what will your people find in the way of spiritual nourishment when they go on Facebook looking for friends, conversations and relationships?

Pastors are used to preaching. They are allowed the unique privilege and responsibility of preparing a message from God’s word each week and communicating that message uninterrupted in a one-way monologue. Those days are over. Preaching from the platform of a church may not have changed much, but there is an increasing demand from church members to have real and meaningful conversations with their ministry leaders beyond the Sunday morning service times and outside the walls of the church.

Many ministers tell me they crave the same kind of contact with their church members. Facebook is a free, handy tool for you to cultivate closer relationships with the segment of people who

come to your church and are part of the Facebook community. Should everyone in your church be on Facebook? Probably not. But if you have church members on Facebook looking for spiritual nourishment throughout the week, shouldn't you be there to provide it?

Additionally, the Facebook network provides new ministry challenges and access to people who are not a part of any church. Many ministry leaders tell me they are so tightly scheduled with church work they seldom have time to cultivate friendships with people who are not believers. It's hard to evangelize people in "the world", when you don't know anyone outside your church. Facebook could be the tool you need for expanding your ministry outreach beyond the walls of your church.

Bottom line: you need to communicate with people. If you connect with people through email, you know how it has enhanced your ministry. Facebook is like email on steroids. Learn it, use it, know it, and it will transform how you do your ministry work in the same dramatic way. To back this point up, I have included some stories of people who are already using Facebook in their ministry.

## What others are saying

### Facebook for the Millennial Generation

I use Facebook to connect with the Millennial Generation culture, connect with young people in the Baltimore area and connecting with other pastors around the nation.

Facebook allows me to view the culture and make observations that will assist me in my primary task of making disciples. The Millennial Generation has about 50 million people between the ages of 12 and 30. They have their own unique view of how to approach life. In general they are technology savvy, intentional about communal relationships and more committed to being spiritual than being a member of a church. They are also the largest group missing from most mainline denominational churches including the congregation that I serve.

Facebook is invaluable as a tool to connect with the Millennial Generation and their culture. I research trends and share my observations with our Vision Team. This has been a valuable tool to assist our members to reassess our young adult ministry paradigm and design a ministry model that is relevant to the community that we serve.

I use Facebook to meet young people and connect them to the ministries of the church. I place classified ads and event notifications about special events within the life of the church. I often ask questions based on a person's profile or their status to begin a conversation and eventually invite them to join us at the Grace Café, our contemporary worship. We have actually have 4-5 people visit us each month usually because they look at the blog, website, or Facebook invitation. Many times they have looked at all three but in conversation the confidence that allowed them to make the visit was the Facebook connection.

I also connect with pastors from around the nation. New church planters, seeker church pastors, evangelical and mainline denominational pastors. Our conversations are about best ministry practices, ways to remain centered on the Gospel, ministry challenges within a church

revitalization and specific blog postings that makes a significant impact. These conversations are mutually beneficial to everyone. Sometimes I am encouraged and sometimes I am the one providing encouragement.

*Rev William T. Chaney, Pastor, West Baltimore UMC*

## **Doing Facebook Together**

Facebook provides a simple, easy to use and maintain tool to keep people connected and in touch with one another. Currently every young person at our church understands and uses Facebook. It is only a matter of time that the value of Facebook catches on and is understood by the masses. Until then, it is important for the church leadership to push forward and learn how to leverage social networking tools in order to help in the mission and work of the church.

In our experience, I am not claiming that we have found the Rosetta Stone and unlocked the key to using Facebook within our church and ministry. Our experience has been clumsy and it has been a patchwork of trial and errors. But there have been a couple of key places that Facebook has taken off.

Our youth have been the most successful in leveraging Facebook. Our high school pastor is using Facebook more than any other communication tool. Facebook and text messaging are the primary means in which teens communicate. Email is old school. MySpace is in the gutter. Blogs and Web sites are passé. Facebook is IT!

Our high school ministry uses Facebook to develop Groups, invite students to special events, post pictures, and communicate with all the students. Our high school pastor has set up several groups. One group is for the high school youth. He has also set up another group that consists of his discipleship group. And then recently he set up a group for our summer Mexico mission trip.

What's so cool about Facebook is that it allows all the communication devices to flow to one spot. Email goes through Facebook. Our high school pastor still posts on several blogs, a personal blog and a high school youth blog. But those blog posts are posted in the Facebook group. Pictures don't come as attachment or posted on Flickr, rather on Facebook as well. What Facebook offers is a single source where a person can go to receive all the necessary communication.

Older adults are beginning to use Facebook at our church, but not necessarily to communicate with one another, but rather as a way to communicate with the youth. For instance, our Children's Team Leader often needs high school volunteers and in the past she could never get a response from them through email. But now she is on Facebook, and students get her requests through Facebook and they actually reply. Facebook has made her life much easier.

Also, as a pastor, I write a blog. Blogging has been a strategic means to communicate with church members throughout the week. But now, Facebook has provided another opportunity for my blogging content to get out to those in the church that subscribe to Facebook. Facebook drives the content to the people who are listed as my friends.

*Bill Reichart, Pastor of "Doing Life Together", Big Creek Church*

## Technology and the Church

Technology has always been a weak spot for churches. We always seem to be struggling just to catch up with the previous decade. The proliferation of Web 2.0 technology, however, has enabled even the smallest church with the tiniest budget to engage in the latest communication methods through the internet at breakneck speed.

Facebook accomplishes much for me. It is an incredible way for me to connect with those in our church and community that are part of younger generations. I can communicate with our younger generations more rapidly, and more effectively, using Facebook as my primary means of communication. Beyond that, however, it gives me a glimpse into the lives of those on Facebook that I would normally never be able to have.

Having access to view their friends, groups, interests, etc is a fascinating exercise in the understanding of modern culture. The rapidly changing context that we live in is never more readily available to you, additionally, then through the avenue of Facebook. If you are a pastor and you are not using Facebook, you are missing an enormous opportunity to engage a large segment of your churches population.

*Micah Fries, Senior Pastor, Frederick Boulevard Baptist Church, St. Joseph, MO*

## Facebook Pros and Cons

I see much value in Facebook for ministry, in spite of its innate weaknesses. It tends to enable a narcissism too common in our age, with the "look at me, I am special" ability via updates, photo albums, and the like. It can also be just another way to waste one's life on the internet, which is why I hesitated to join this movement for so long. I have a life and do not need something else to add to my time. Of course, having a Treo helps me as most of my FB time is handled right on my phone. I also find all the applications extremely annoying. Give me a wall, message capability, and a photo album and I am good.

That being said, FB has become a vital tool to me. That is in no small part due to the fact that I travel all over the country, speaking to youth, college students, and churches. So, when I go to a town, I try to set up an event and invite FB friends who are there. I have had some wonderful reunions at places like Liberty University and Clemson, for example. So one great asset of FB for an itinerant like me is its capacity to keep in touch with people I may see periodically but not regularly. Recently I went to Oklahoma and saw three special friends I would never have seen had it not been for FB.

FB also avails me to encourage believers with occasional wall posts, and more specifically through the writing of notes. As an author I likely post more than others. I have found that more people read my notes on FB than the same information posted on my blog! I have given my life to the under 30something population, and FB enables me in that. I encourage college students from afar and my teenage daughter Hannah's friends nearby.

While there are many others, a final way FB helps me in ministry is through the building of relationships I would never have built without this technology. I have traveled and preached for many years. Over the last two years I have discovered the amazing way FB helps me to build

deeper and more lasting relationships with people I never would have otherwise. Every week I speak to young adults I have met only once or twice in person, but who have become better friends via FB. No, I do not attempt deep, long term discipleship here, although I suppose you could. But I do find the ministry of encouragement, which is an important part of discipleship, to be very effective here.

So, I am a believer in Facebook. It, like other means of communication, can be used for the glory of God or abused. I choose to use it for the Kingdom.

*Jon Rehbein, Adjunct Professor, Mid-America Christian University, Oklahoma City, OK*

### **Networking through Facebook**

I have recently begun using Facebook to set up a network of like-minded pastors and church planters in my area. We recently met for the first time and shared book ideas, recommended conferences, and helped each other with some of our greatest struggles. It was very encouraging. Each of these pastors I met on Facebook. The connection piece on Facebook is so easy to do. When I request to add a pastor, I usually rely on their network, picture and friends list to determine if they may be a pastor. When I add them, I send a note telling them who I am and what my intent is. So far I've met some great new Internet friends. Thanks Facebook.

*Ron Edmondson, Grace Community Church, Clarksville, TN*

### **Spiritual Direction and Facebook**

I use Facebook to do online spiritual direction with a young mom whom I met through an internet discussion board. She preferred that we use Facebook for our messages, as it seems to be a more reliable method of communication.

One thing that is so helpful is having the time to consider how I want to respond to what she has said. When doing spiritual direction in person, you don't get a chance to see what the other person has said, and then have time to read, re-read and pray over it. The words are there for you to really ponder over, so that the response can be more complete. I've really enjoyed using Facebook in this manner!

*Lisa Fleischhauer, Director of Spiritual Formation, Three Oaks Fellowship UMC*

### **Facebook, Prayer, and Evangelism**

One of the ways in which I view Facebook as a ministry and not just a "social network" is to pray for the six (6) friends that pop up when I first open the page. This gives me an opportunity to message those six and let them know that today someone is praying for them specifically.

Using this an encouragement and as an evangelism tool has allowed me to minister and encourage fellow believers, as well as witness to non-believers.

God is allowing me to reach people daily, keeping focus on others and not just myself, and the impact has been tremendous. As an example, one young man listed as an "Atheist" has spent 3 months discussing the "Person of Christ" and is closer to conversion through simple conversation. God can use this medium if we find ways to use it and allow God to work through us daily.

*David Lee, Ministry Lay Leader*

## **Renewing Connections**

Primarily, I have used Facebook to reconnect with hundreds of children (now college-age or graduates) that I ministered to many years back. I was a children's pastor for a large mega-church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma for ten years. We taught and ministered to over 1,200 children annually, in twenty-three ministries with over 750 volunteers. I have moved on from the church and am involved in a church plant, consulting and running a corporate chaplaincy business. Facebook has enabled me to have a presence in their lives again in a very meaningful way. To say the students and graduates were astonished to see their old children's pastor with a page on Facebook would be an understatement. While they were surprised, they were also thrilled I was back in their lives again. I answer questions about life, church, God, relationships, education, marriage, careers and other general stuff. Having someone besides their parents to talk to has meant the world to most of them. Jesus wanted us to go into all the world and teach, preach, baptize, and make disciples...I believe that means the virtual world as well. This is so rewarding for me and hopefully for the students as well!

*Boe Parrish, Church Planter*