

Youth minister helps students go on mission online

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Like innovators of the past who used the printing press, radio and television to spread the gospel, a growing number of Christians today are taking their message to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, podcasts, YouTube, Flickr and MySpace.

Minnesota youth pastor Tim Schmoyer saw an opportunity to share Christ through such sites and organized an online mission trip, described as “a two-week outreach campaign for teenagers and youth leaders to capitalize on the tremendous social opportunities that exist on the Internet and use it to share Christ with unsaved friends all over the world.”

Schmoyer promoted the outreach through—naturally—social media, pulling in more than 2,000 individuals and dozens of churches as participants.

A “Twitter-aholic” institutes the “online mission trip” at his church.

Doug Blankenship, self-described “Twitter-aholic” and youth pastor at Holland Avenue Baptist Church in Cayce, S.C., saw Schmoyer’s posts and became interested in signing up his group.

“I was attracted to a new approach and new look at the old established goal that we have to reach out,” Blankenship said. The online mission trip also came at a strategic time in his church’s life, he said.

Prior to the outreach, his youth group had been studying “Dare 2 Share” evangelism curriculum and DVDs.

“I thought the online mission trip would be a way to renew our emphasis to

be comfortable and confident in bringing God up in conversation with people, and not be afraid, intimidated or feel like a weirdo,” said Blankenship, who used his Facebook status, posts and profile to talk about Jesus, eternity and the Bible.

Blankenship hopes to continue to incorporate the Internet and social media into his ministry “to spread the gospel even wider.”

He also plans to hold training sessions for parents of teens to help them understand the media better.

After the online mission trip, Blankenship and his youth group will seek to funnel new students into their small-group ministry where leaders are preparing to begin a study of *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel.

Blankenship is praying that a wrap-up gathering for the online mission trip will include at least “two or three students sharing that they had a conversation where they really went beyond what they have in the past. If a few share, then that mindset spreads to others,” he said.

“I’ll never be as effective in sharing with their friends as they are. They are making Christ known and real to their friends who don’t believe. If this is a first step to seeing that happen, that’s exactly why we jumped in.”