

Voices: Pastors, stop texting church members

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A great deal has changed in the way communication is done since I began serving in local churches. With the advent of texting, email, social media and the Web, our modes of communication have become a hallmark of effectiveness for us, sometimes leading pastors and church leaders to believe using those forms of communication is a mark of our efficiency and “with-it-ness.”



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I’m not anti-technology, but I’ve also come to recognize that while there are times to use digital communication, there also are plenty of times to move in a different direction.

Here are a few principles I’ve discovered for my own ministry:

1. Text-based communication can be easily misinterpreted.

When I send a text or an email, instead of speaking face-to-face, I am foregoing body language, tone of voice, eye contact and all of the other variables that power interpersonal communication. Sometimes, circumstances force you to use email or text, but when you can see

someone in person or make a call, your communication drastically improves.

All the more important: When the conversation centers around conflict or has the potential to be emotionally charged, avoid texting or emailing at all costs. When my adrenaline is high, I write poorly. When my adrenaline is high, I also read poorly.

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Many a conflict went on far too long because the invested parties refused to meet face-to-face.

2. Don't rely on digital communication—especially social media—to recruit volunteers.

When you post you need three more volunteers to work the registration desk for your upcoming event, you are slicing yourself with a double-edged sword. Edge Number One: The only individuals who will respond are those who are most likely already overworked. Edge Number Two: You (not-so) subtly communicate to your church you are either unorganized or too lazy to recruit face-to-face.

Sure, we all end up in times where we need last-minute help, but you're better served to send an email or—even better—make some calls. This doesn't mean you can't use social media at all, but it does mean it should be part of a multi-faceted recruitment strategy.

3. Text messages are the lowest level of pastoral care.

Do I send text messages to those who I think need to hear from me? Absolutely. But they are not the best way to provide pastoral support. The hierarchy of pastoral care communication is as follows:

- In person
- Someone else, in person
- Video call
- Phone call
- Email/text message

If it is important, and if your schedule allows, go in person. If you can't go, turn to other staff, deacons, elders, volunteers. A personal touch always is best in essential pastoral-care situations. If that isn't possible, only then turn to "out-of-body" communication forms. Video calls are better than phone calls are better than text messages and emails. Why? Because voice inflection communicates so very much.

These three principles have served me well over the years. I'm reminded God, in his wisdom, gave us Jesus—in person. He knew we needed incarnational ministry. He wired us as such. We have a Savior who is present with us now, available to us, personally. Each of us craves personal attention—specifically face-to-face.

Pastors and church leaders would do well to adopt the communication strategy of Jesus as often as possible—to be physically present.

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