



**152nd Session
of the
Pittsburgh - West Virginia
Annual Conference
of the
African Methodist Episcopal Church
September 17, 2019 – September 21, 2019**

“Faith and Technology in the 21st Century”

To

The Pittsburgh – West Virginia Annual Conference

Submitted By,

**Reverends: Erwin McIntosh Jr., Dale Snyder, John Sylvia,
Christina Reed and Buena Paschall.**

**Laypersons: Andre Nelson, Tiffany Cofield, Roslind Fisher,
David Paschall, Reneta Powell and Sharon Banks.**

To: *The Right Reverend Frank Madison Reid, III, Presiding Prelate*

Mrs. Marlaa Hall Reid, Episcopal Supervisor of Missions

The Reverend Dr. Eric L. Brown, Host Presiding Elder, The Allegheny-Scranton District

The Reverend Alton B. Dillard, Co-Host Presiding Elder, The West Virginia District

The Reverend Dr. James H. McLemore, Co-Host Presiding Elder, The Pittsburgh District

The Reverend Dr. James H. Harris, Sr., Host Pastor

Mrs. Marsha Washington and Mr. Andre Nelson, Conference Co-Chairpersons

Faith and Technology in the 21st Century

(Some information in this Report uses Information According to an article on January 7, 2013 By [Rachel Wojo RachelWojo.com](http://RachelWojo.com))

In understanding Faith and Technology in the 21st Century the Church must, look at what the bible says about faith and technology, examine where it connects with technology, and achieve balance in its use of faith and technology.

So what exactly does the Bible say regarding faith and technology. The time period in which the Bible was written held no knowledge of the modern media devices and access that we have today. Biblical principles of responsibility and stewardship, as well as the instruction to “Go into all the world.” gives us an understanding about how to use technology and social media. We examine three basic Biblical principles that assist us in comprehending what the Christian’s approach to technology and media usage should look like.

1. Every Church is accountable to God for its time, talents, and treasure. If technology and media usage is available for our use, then God wants us to use that gift for our growth and His glory. The church therefore has a responsibility and is accountable to God with their technology and media usage according to the ability God has given to them. (Romans 14:12)

2. Using technology and media for Christian growth and God’s glory is imperative because of its availability. Paul spoke to the church at Ephesus about the urgency of walking through whatever doors God had opened for them. “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Eph. 5:15&16 (NIV). **“Making the most of every opportunity”** tells us that regardless of the time period or the technological advances, if the opportunity is available, then accountability is inevitable. This principle applies to the church as a whole and to individual Christians. Our generation will be held accountable to God for the gift of modern technology and our use of it. Every church should ask the questions:

1. What opportunities are available to the church to use technology and media for our growth and God’s glory?
2. Is the Church using those opportunities to the best of its abilities?
3. Is God receiving the glory for our technology and media usage, whether it is a Facebook status, tweet, website, podcast or blog post?

3. Modern technology and media provide a vast scope of accessibility to spread God's love and His plan of salvation to the entire world. Consider these facts from 2013:

If "Facebook" were a country, it would be the third largest in the world after China and India. Google services 100 Billion searches per month. 34.3% of the world has internet access; 1/3 of the world can potentially be reached through the internet.

II. The church connects with technology to obey the command of Jesus to go out into the world making disciples of all nations. It is the responsibility of the church to teach the good news, fight injustices, transition students to disciples and balance the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the people. The means to achieve this has changed vastly and continually from the time the commission was given til today. The church continually undergoes paradigm shifts that affect how we operate. In the 21st century the church is experiencing the paradigm shift from paper to electronic media. Churches are undergoing the acceptance of technology and media usage in society and within their own doors. The number of tablet users in the US is over 31% of the population and is expected to be at 47% by the end of 2013. The #1 use for tablets is content consumption. By the end of 2011, approximately 6 billion cell phone subscriptions existed- enough for 86 out of 100 people. Modern churches have a door of opportunity to reach into the daily lives of Christians in their communities, states the nation and the world over. The apostles had to communicate by hand delivered letters, churches of yesterday communicated by postal mail, then phone calls and later email. Today they communicate with instant texts, tweets, podcasts, blogs and websites. Today, the church can embrace technology and social media to interact with church members almost instantly. With one tweet, a pastor can let his church know a meeting is cancelled due to inclement weather; with one Facebook status, churches have the opportunity to engage with members daily. No more waiting until Sunday or Wednesday. The church can fully operate as the body of Christ, integrated on a modern level.

Are leaders of churches today willing to embrace this new opportunity and treat it as a responsibility and privilege? Some churches are incredibly excited, providing online streaming of their services and encouraging social media usage during messages. Some have accepted tablets and smartphone usage during the sermon for Bible reading and social media conversation; while others don't quite have the picture of how technology connects with worshipping God or the church's role in connecting technology and faith.

III. The church must achieve balance in its technology and media usage. The church, while engaging with members online and virtually, must ensure that those not connected to the internet or social media are not left out. The church must leverage the use its online footprint recognizing that these are tools to help them connect with their members, community and the world at large. While technology has given us the ability

to communicate in real time it is no replacement for the “human touch” needed in the church. Many of our older church members are not connected to social media. They do not use cell phones and many that do, only use them to make and receive phone calls. Three guidelines to balancing faith and technology or social media usage are:

1. Are church relationships suffering because of overuse of media devices or social media? Be practical about the amount of time spent using social media tools. The church must constantly ask is our media usage slowing productivity (or stopping it all together)? An online Bible Study Class is an enhancement to and not a replacement of a the Church Bible Study Class. Is the time spent developing, maintaining or using our online footprint having a negative impact on church responsibilities, is it impairing our time with God and other relationships that God has entrusted the Church with? For example, do we no longer visit the sick but refer them to access our online prayer line. Online Sermons do not replace the need to commune with the Holy Spirit in sermon development. As a Church, the gift of social media and technology usage shouldn't hinder the churches ability to help their members faith walk, rather; it should enhance their faith by providing a ready source of information, and services that foster faith in God.

2. Be purposeful about the manner in which you use social media. Facebook is not a tool to spread church gossip or complain about the Pastors sermon. The church must ensure that what is being posted to their accounts contain the message they want to convey. The church must be very purposeful when using texts, tweets and other online communications choosing the words, actions and messages that are necessary and serve the purpose they were intended to.

3. Be pursuing and pleasing God through the church's technology and social media usage. Be purposeful about it and don't waste the privilege and in all things Glorify God. Facebook post, texts, tweets, podcasts and websites should ultimately teach and spread the word of God. They should enable individuals to grow spiritually and bring glory to God.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31

Four simple words to guide our social media and technology usage are: practical, purposeful, pursuing (God) and pleasing (God). Is what we are saying or doing practical and needed, does it have a purpose and pursue God; is it pleasing, glorifying to God?

We submit the following recommendations:

The Church should:

- 1. Develop policies and procedures to guide its social media and technology usage. The church should also have a Technology and Social Media Administrator whose role is to ensure the church is using technology and social media responsibly, ethically and purposefully.*
- 2. Have security to prevent the hacking of its internet websites and prevent the improper use of its social media.*
- 3. Churches should have websites that accommodate individuals with various disabilities such as captioning for the visually impaired and text readers for those that have hearing disabilities. The church should also secure ways to receive donations on their websites and Facebook accounts. They should ensure that donations can be made, during service, by cell phone.*
- 4. The church should use technology to give the gospel message through podcasts, brief messages and biblical knowledge to the segment of the population that does not want to attend church, but want to know more about God and Jesus.*