

Response to Gould Discourse

Rev. Kelly Weisman Asprooth-Jackson

Thank you, Linda, for the invitation to respond to your talk tonight. You mentioned some awesome tools for ministry that are to be found in new technologies. There are a number of UU bloggers out there who have highlighted others. Rev. Naomi King had a piece recently on using 4Square in her ministry. 4square can notify people you're already connected to by Twitter and Facebook where you are in the real world - among other things, Naomi has used this to give a final coax to her congregants to get to church on Sunday morning. 'I'm at church - where are you?' In my own life, I deeply appreciate the way in which Facebook allows me to stay connected to, and to make new connections with my colleagues all over the country and the world.

What unites most of the information technologies we've talked about tonight is that they empower individuals: the possibilities for sharing your message, adding value to your work and building your brand are considerable. Magnifying the ministry of our leadership through these means is a wonderful thing, but what would be better would be to use technologies to strengthen the congregation directly and serve our larger purpose as a liberal faith. More than magnifying the work of individuals, I am excited about empowering communities, and facilitating new sorts of holy conversations.

A few examples: The Church of the Larger Fellowship, at which I interned, has a system of small group ministry which takes place entirely on-line. A number of our brick-and-mortar congregations have enough home-bound members that they might think of forming an on-line option for their covenant groups. This would offer a

distance ministry that is still rooted in a specific context, and help people continue to feel a part of their religious home, even when they can't get there in person.

Further out ahead into unexplored territory are services like GoogleWave, which, through real-time editing by multiple participants, allows for a deep and rich online collaboration and could be used for a variety of congregational projects. We might think about creating a repository of institutional wisdom online through a congregational wiki. UU blogger Chalice Chick has even argued on the basis of our democratic values for moving some of our congregational decision making on-line. If you're as much of a governance geek as I am, then that idea either really excites you, or makes you want to vomit with fear.

The gospel of the internet and related technologies is connection – we are tethered one to another by fiber-optics and satellite transmissions, wrapped in cell phone and wifi signals. The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker once observed in my presence that there are many different ways in which we can be connected to each other, and not all of them are healthy or lifegiving – some can be terribly destructive. We should be attentive, therefore, not only to the fact that we are connected, but to the quality of those connections.

As we consider this, we should remember that most of the technologies that we've talked about here tonight emerged from a place of isolation and consumption: a dominant culture that does not share our values. A Unitarian Universalist congregation is a

fundamentally counter-cultural institution. The extent to which we remember that is the extent to which we are capable of changing the world. So whatever technological innovation we may make use of, we must take care to do so in the service of reasons that are our own. To save lives, to grow souls, to heal the world. No fad or fetish can save us, but for a faith as great as ours, a dream as big as ours, everything is worth trying.