

## To Facebook or Not?

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Over the past year I have created a website for the local church I serve. On that page I have blogs, and vlogs, and podcasts. We have forums and announcement boards. Our church calendar is posted there. I have very little idea exactly how many people actually use the website, but I know some do and it has been a valuable resource. It takes quite a bit of effort and time to keep it updated and keep the content fresh. Now mind you, I'm a church geek(i.e Pastor), not a tech geek. But it's worked out pretty well.

One of the things I have long thought about but have resisted is doing a Facebook page for our church. I have often wondered if there would be any usefulness to it beyond what the church website offers, or would I just be making more work. I did not know how much effort it would take to get it started or to keep it running, but I was about to find out.

I decided to go ahead and give it a try. Why not? It sure was not going to hurt anything. So what you find below is a list of my reasons for doing it, a few brief observations I made, and my overall assessment of it's usefulness in My situation. Your context may call for different conclusions. So, I hope this is helpful in some way:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Milton-Marlboro-United-Methodist-Church/226271034060400>

### **My approach:**

The first choice I was faced with was posed by Professor Mary Hess, would I open a Group or a page. I went to Facebook and found the following guide:

*“Pages allow real organizations, businesses, celebrities and brands to communicate broadly with people who like them. Pages may only be created and managed by official representatives.*

*Groups provide a closed space for small groups of people to communicate about shared interests. Groups can be created by anyone.”*

After reading this I decided to open a page instead of a group just from this description. The language used to describe the group describes an attitude I am trying to move my congregation away from in how it thinks of itself as a church. My hope is that the Facebook page will provide a broader and more open opportunity to connect in a more inclusive way.

### **My observations:**

-In setting up the page I find I'm still a little afraid that this will become just one more thing for me to manage on a weekly basis. Though, admittedly, it wasn't that intimidating as I set it up. Maybe it won't be that much work.

-I am not as familiar with Facebook and the many tools it offers to institutions. This is going to be a learning curve. But so far there has been nothing that seems overwhelming. It's a learning curve, but not a steep one.

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-I want this to be more than just a bulletin board. How do I encourage using our Facebook page as a opportunity for engagement? How do I set it up so that it invites such engagement? I've decided many of my posts will be in question format.

-In setting the page up I became more aware of the opportunities that exist for different churches in using Facebook. I wasn't sure how I would use it until I took some time to actually explore it. Regardless of whether you would ultimately create a page(or group) for your congregation, it is well worth the investigation.

### **My assessment:**

The jury is still out, but I am going to give it a go. I have now created the page, and I have decided to actually put it into use in my local congregation. My initial impressions are that it will be another way for us to engage the congregation. My hope is that it will become something broader than that. I would like to promote our Facebook page as something that reaches beyond the borders that compose this local congregation. I would like to see a much broader engagement.

I believe a Facebook page for this local congregation has much potential, but as with so many other things in life(and ministry) it is only as good as what you make of it. Certainly it has it's own innate limitations, but they are then compounded by the self-imposed limitations of the users. In the end the success(or lack there of) of this Facebook page will rest on the diligence of this pastor, the engagement of people local and global, and the how the winds of the Spirit move along the digital skyline of our little page.