

## Chapter Five

### The cyber community and mission

#### 5.1. Introduction

The role of the community has become increasingly central in understanding mission. And, today, the wider understanding of community has changed as society has changed (Lord 2002: 196). One of the main reasons for the change in society is the technological revolution.

The emergence of interactive communications has caused changes that fundamentally altered lives, communities and the pattern of history. Many people are interacting with one another through the cyber space. It formed a cyber community.

In this chapter, the cyber community in the context of current missionary thinking will be examined, beginning by examining the understanding of the term community, and then looking at the cyber community and its definition.

#### 5.2. Community

##### 5.2.1. Definition of community

During human growth, people encounter sets of other individuals and experiences. For example, infants first encounter their family, then the extended family, and then the local community, such as the school and work communities. These encounters with people make for community in life<sup>47</sup>.

According to Heller et al (1984), the community is a social group or organism sharing an environment, normally with shared interests. That is to say, the community is a relational interaction that draws people together through social groups. The community members often interact regularly. It is typically growing in a location or place<sup>48</sup>.

Such regularity of interaction tends to weld participants together as a variety of social conditions, such as intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks and a number of other conditions may be present (Lord 2002: 197).

Schafer and Lamm (1992:546) add the following phenomena that are useful for understanding of communities:

- Communities influence who our significant others will be.

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<sup>47</sup> The word community is derived from the Latin *communitas* (community fellowship), which is in turn derived from *communis*, which means "common, public, shared by all or many". *Communis* comes from a combination of the Latin prefix *con-* (which means "together") and the word *munis* (which has to do with performing services) (Harper 2001).

<sup>48</sup> In their "definition of community", Schaefer and Lamm (1992:546) remark that "[It is] ...a spatial or territorial unit of social organization, in which people have a sense of identity and a feeling of belonging".

- It is a source of social standards and formal and informal control<sup>49</sup>.

People are not members of one specific community only, but of many communities (Wellman 1997:211-238). According to Bernard (Jones 1997), people might exist spatially in one area, but their communal existence might be located elsewhere.

McMillan and Chavis (Kunzmann 2002:84) identify four elements of the sense of community: 1) Experience of membership, 2) The individual feels he/she has influence in the group, 3) Members' needs are integrated and fulfilled by the community, and 4) Shared emotional connection. These four elements of the sense of community also emphasize the social aspects of the phenomenal world.

### **5.2.2. Christian community**

This study is interested in the design of the Christian community that enables it for mission. One of the reasons for the existence of the church is the human need of one another; they need community. And the community is not an excuse for the individual to hide in a crowd (Luzbetak 1988:376-377).

According to the Bible (Genesis 1:27), human beings are created in God's image, therefore, in the early Christian communities believers cared for one another<sup>50</sup>. Every member was cared for because whatever was done to the least member of the community was regarded as having been done to God himself:

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<sup>49</sup> The shared histories between individuals in a community become the legacies of the people in them, and consequently continue to influence people joining the community, even when the original members of the group are gone.

<sup>50</sup> The early Christian communities shared not only their material goods but also their spiritual blessings (Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:9-14).

"The King will reply, I tell the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Every member had been redeemed by the same price, the blood of the Son of God himself:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"(Jn. 3:16)<sup>51</sup>.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's paper on Christian fellowship in *Life Together* remains one of the strong statements on Christian community. According to his discussion of Christian fellowship, Christian fellowship is not the same thing as face to face fellowship. His statement is very important for examining the relationship between the cyber community and the Christian community.

"Because Christian community is founded solely on Jesus Christ, it is a spiritual and not a human reality. In this it differs absolutely from all other communities. The Scriptures call "spiritual" that which is created only by the Holy Spirit, who puts Jesus Christ into our hearts as Lord and Saviour. The Scriptures term "human" that which comes from the natural urges, powers, and capacities of the human spirit" (Bonhoeffer 1954:31).

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<sup>51</sup> According to John's Gospel 17:21, at the last Supper Jesus prayed "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21), the very ultimate in unity. And if God has loved us so, we must have the same love for one another" (1 John 4:11). That is to say, God wants us to be a unity and a community of love for one another.

According to the apostle Paul, the building up of the body of Christ is important in Christian leadership<sup>52</sup>. It also includes a deepening of Christian community. The ministry of Christian leaders, who are given to the church by the grace of God, draws the Christian community closer to Jesus Christ. And when the Christian Community is drawn closer to Jesus Christ, the members of the community are brought closer to one another. If all members of the Christian community are drawn closer to Jesus Christ, they will find it easy to be more deeply connected to one another spiritually (Jewell 2004:41-42).

Without Jesus Christ there would never have been a Christian community. Jesus Christ must be the centre of the Christian community, and the Christian community needs the work of the Holy Spirit who energizes them to build up the body of Jesus Christ.

In his book Luzbetak (1998:378) notes that genuinely Christian Communities try to maintain the following features:

- Christian communities might be built on faith - values.
- Christian communities seek freedom from within - that is, freedom to love God and neighbor unshackled by selfish-ness.
- Christian communities can be satisfied with nothing less than organic oneness and wholeness.

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<sup>52</sup> "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11-12).

### 5.3. Cyber community

Increasingly one hears reference to the world and its entire people as a "global village". We are living in different countries, but the interdependence between different countries is growing. A century and more ago it was impossible to know the happening in all parts of the world. Therefore, people lived in relative isolation from one another. However, as a result of advances in the development of the electronic media, such as the internet, the world became a one community world.

The internet has grown from 1000 to 10 million users over the last 25 years (Rheingold 1994:8). Since 1993 computer networks have grabbed enormous public attention. These computer networks create new places of assembly. It is called the cyber community (Virtual community, online or Net community).

The cyber community generates good opportunities for social contact, political participation, employment and entertainment. Beside cell phones and telephones, computer networks are being used to connect people to people (Wellman 1997:211-238).

In cyber communities people from all over the world participate through the internet. People can reach out to one another twenty-four hours a day from almost anywhere in the world. Cyber space allows individuals to reach out globally, and also break down some of the barriers such as physical barriers and social distinctions, between countries and people and make communication and understanding possible (Turkle 1996: 9-10).

People overwhelmingly use the cyber communities as a place to meet new people and as a giant information library. According to Horrigan (2001), the lives of cyber communities are affected not only by online relationship but also by offline relationships.

Cyber space offers room for thousands of people who want to share information, discuss mutual interest and carry on business. Some groups are both large and well developed, but some critics have argued that these groups do not constitute real communities.

Lyon (1988:viii) notes that cyber communities and face-to-face (real) communities are not distinct, but influence each other. There is continual interaction between cyber communities and face-to-face communities. The cyber community has the potential to support and help face-to-face communities.

Today many people, especially the young generation who use the computer network, mix cyber and real-life communities in their minds. In other words, cyber communities influence both our individual self-identity and our expression of society:

"Not only do I inhabit my virtual communities; to the degree that I carry around their conversations in my head and begin to mix it up with them in real life, my virtual communities also inhabit my life. I've been colonized; my sense of family at the most fundamental level has been virtualised (Rheingold 1993:10)."

Lord (2002: 204-206) suggests a definition for cyber communities.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> In his ground breaking book *The Virtual Community*, Rheingold (1993: 3) notes that "virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyber space."

The interaction between individuals can be seen to be characterized in cyber communities by four factors:

- 1) Interactions are between geographically dispersed individuals;
- 2) They use text-based communication;
- 3) Communication is one-way with delayed responses; and
- 4) Members may assume identities not their own.

Cyber communities will continue to develop and grow, becoming an increasing part of the identity of many people. However, we need caution because many cyber communities are fluid and transitory and so will have changing identities.

#### **5.4. Cyber community and mission**

The internet is a very powerful tool for missions and evangelism. As mentioned above, when cyber space is used for mission, it can reach places that are difficult for missionaries to access by ordinary means. Therefore, cyber communities are a very powerful and usable tool for mission as well.

Cyber space is used for ill as well as for good. It is the responsibility of the people of God to understand the cyber community, and aggressively pursue the missionary responsibility of the church to reach "the ends of the World (John P. Jewell 2004:60).

According to Jewell (2004: 60-61), cyber space is a good tool for missions and evangelism; nevertheless, the virtual community cannot replace the real Christian community for several reason.

- The cyber community is a community without responsibility. People can join the cyber community



whenever they wish and say whatever they wish without responsibility.

- The cyber community does not have permanence. A cyber community is made easy, but also disappears easily. If there is any place where people are "here today and gone tomorrow," it is in the cyber world.
- The cyber community does not have canons of truth. Identities are unchecked. Consider the following comment made by an internet user (Dawson & Cowan 2004:80): Unlike the church, when I am in cyber space, nobody really knows, unless I tell them, whether I am black, white, red, yellow, or even male or female, whether I am writing from a hovel or a palatial estate. Nobody knows my educational background or lack of it, or even my age.

It is easy to deceive and be deceived in cyber communities. Because of these unchecked identities many people are extremely vulnerable (Jewell 2004: 60-61).

However, Lord (2002:196-207) suggested that the appearance of cyber communities reflects the *Missio Dei* of the creator God who enabled us to live in a dynamic relationship with Him and with one another. "The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone (Genesis 2:18)." That is to say, God did not create us to be alone.

As we know, disconnection between God and humanity is a result of sin<sup>54</sup>. Their sin led Adam and Eve to disobey God. The result of their disobedience is their disconnection with God. God's redemptive plan sent Jesus to take upon himself the consequence of human sin. God's redemptive plan was fulfilled when, "the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). As a result of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, it possible to reconnect with God. Redemption is made possible in Christ.

Fellowship with God is the foundation of community. God wants to interact with people and communities. Therefore, the mission of the cyber community also includes the building of relationships in the name of God.

Cyber communities offer an important challenge to church communities' mission. The cyber community must be a tool to be used for world missions, and cyber communities must be shaped by the experience of God (Lord 2002:205).

### **5.5. A specific example of the cyber community: cyber church**

The faith of the Christian communities' relationship with God in Jesus Christ is made complete in the fellowship where the incarnational Word is at the heart of the community (1Jn. 1:1-3).

The Word of God is conveyed by the preacher to the receivers. Digital technologies can also transport the Word of God. Many Christian leaders and their churches are presently using common digital technologies in their ministry.

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<sup>54</sup> Isaiah 59:2, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sin have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."

Pastors have discovered the aid of digital technologies to enhance their ministry, build up the community, and to strengthen the church. The internet is a part of many Christians' daily life. Today millions of people and the church are actively using the internet.<sup>55</sup> Consider the following comment made by Christian member (Jeweell 2004:34):

"Can you help us out? Almost every church in town has a web-site except us. If we don't gets a web-site going we're to miss out on visitors."

In his book *The Internet Church*, Walter Wilson (2004:48) notes:<sup>56</sup>

"The Christian do not view the internet as technology, but as God's moving to bring the gospel to every man, woman, and child upon the world. With the internet we have the opportunity to reach every man, woman, and child upon the face of the world in the next decade."

The use of technologies and internet in the church provides us with additional opportunities for the growth of the church.

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<sup>55</sup> Many churches have their own Web page. For example, the American Bible Society's ([www.housesofworship.net](http://www.housesofworship.net)) commitment of funds (\$5 million) to an Internet service setting aside a free Web page for churches and congregations. The only requirement for churches is that they spend time to keep the sites up to date.

<sup>56</sup> In his book *eMinistry*, Andrew Carega (2001:16) also notes "If the church does not begin to encompass the online world in its ministry, it risks losing even more of its eroding influence in society."

### 5.5.1. What is the cyber church?

- **Church**

This section does not attempt to provide general information about the church and its history, but various understandings of what church should do and be.

The church, is a word that is used to translate the Greek *ekklesia*, which has the idea of an assembly and is thus translated in Act 19:32,41 (Young 1989:144-145). The meaning of the Greek *ekklesia* are as follows: (1) meeting in a general sense, as a gathering of a citizens' assembly, (Act 19:32); (2) as the assembled people of the Israel congregation (Heb. 2:12); (3) congregation, meeting as the assembled Christian community church (Rom. 16:5); (4) church as the totality of Christians living in one place (Act 8:1); (5) church as the universal body of believers (Eph. 1:22).

In her book *Religion and Technology in the 21st Century; Faith in the E-World*, George (2006:144-145) notes, in the church four different functions can be identified; out-reach, in-reach, up-reach and down-reach.

- Out-reach - The church reaching out to those outside the church (evangelism, missions).
- In-reach - The church reaching in to those inside church (encouragement, fellowship, accountability).
- Up-reach - The church reaching up to God (praising, prayer).
- Down-reach - God reaching down to the church (Bible study, listening to the Holy Spirit).

This definition of the four different functions captures the "Great Commission" in Scripture to "reach out"<sup>57</sup> and "build up within."<sup>58</sup> That is to say, the cyber church must look at the function of the church and, being church, must attempt to fulfill these functions of the church (George 2006: 144-145).

- **Cyber church**

Wilson (2004) coined the term "Internet Church (cyber church)" in his book of the same title. According to him, the typical resources of the cyber church are a web site with a bulletin board forum, or perhaps an online chat room.

The cyber church must look at the functions of the conventional church, and being church must attempt to fulfill in a way some of the functions of the conventional church. The internet has been used for church ministry as well as for its mission of spreading the gospel message.

There are many Christian web sites and online institutions that call themselves "cyber church (George 2006:142-144)," focusing on making virtual Christian communities. The cyber world, according to researchers, can support all that is needed in the function of the church. The cyber church is able to function as a conventional church today (George 2006: 142-147).

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew 28:19 (Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.), the function of the church is to "go," "make disciples," "baptize," and "teach."

<sup>58</sup> Ephesians 4:12 (to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up), the function of the church is "to equip the church members for the works of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."

### 5.5.2. A brief history of the cyber church

- **A world-wide phenomenon**

The computers which appeared in the 1940s and 1950s were very huge and consisted of a mass of vacuum bulbs linked together by miles of wire. These computers were very expensive and required special rooms.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s computers became smaller and less expensive. In the 1970s computers became available to many organizations of all types, not only in their central offices, but in regional offices as well. During the late 1970s even smaller and less expensive computers were produced.

In 1980, with appearance of the small personal computers, computers were fit for an office desk. During the 1980s computers began to appear in church offices, even in local congregations. At that time the users of personal computers had been growing among ministers, priests and active lay-persons in the church. They began to explore computers as tools for church ministry in the early 1980s.

However, many churches had been using the computers only for office work. Congregations installed a computer on the secretary's desk but not in the minister's study in the 1980s. Theological schools also provided computers for their secretary's typing work, but not for their lecturers.

In the mid-1980s "The Church Computer User's Network (CCUN)" was created in the church by the United Methodist Church in USA. The Church Computer User's Network became an ecumenical and national organization. According to Lochhead

(1997), among evangelicals, the development of local bulletin board systems (BBS) was popular<sup>59</sup>.

In the early 1990s very few people had access to the internet, however, since mid-1980s the computer network in the church has experienced continued growth. In 2009 the computer network (internet) became part of everyday life for many people around the world. While in the early 1990s the Internet was of marginal interest to the church things have changed dramatically since then (Hudd & Reimann 2006: 11).

The Pew internet and American Life Report of 2001 noted that twenty-eight million people in United States turned to the internet for religious purposes. By 2004 that number had jumped to eight-two million. In other words, the religious usage of internet is expanding exponentially ( Jakobsh 2006:237).

Today the Christian churches have to recognize the importance of its presence on the internet, and of the special responsibilities of the churches in dealing with cyber space (internet).

#### • **The cyber church in South Africa**

According to Buys (2000), the year in which the first South African internet activity was established is 1988, when Ting Chong began using the CPSA (the Church of the Province of South Africa) e-mail network. The first internet e-mail message on the CPSA network was the first internet activity on the African continent. This first e-mail message on the CPSA network was not only an event of general historical internet in South Africa, but also an event of the church using the internet.

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<sup>59</sup> In the mid-1980s, a bulletin board systems (BBS) could be installed on almost any desktop computer and connected to a telephone line (Lochhead 1997:48).

This CPISA's internet e-mail network in South Africa was possible through the support of the Trinity Church in New York City. They provided a computer, modem and software to each Bishop's office.

According to Richard Kraft who was the CPISA bishop of Pretoria until 1998, this network was a special tool for the CPISA bishops in Southern Africa (Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland) to communicate with one other. Actually, it was the time of apartheid, therefore this CPISA network was related directly to the political freedom (Lombaard 2003:16-26).

Today many South African people are living in the cyber world; nevertheless, most of the black peoples are not using the internet. There is more to the cyber church than a couple of web-sites. South Africa has 11 official languages. Dr. Stephan Joubert and his team, created an Afrikaans cyber church (<http://www.ekerk.co.za>) and an English cyber church (<http://www.echurch.co.za>) to serve others in cyber world. These cyber churches are more than blogs in the cyber world.

The focus of this cyber church is Jesus; less church, less issues, more Jesus. According to the Stephan Joubert who is the founder and main writer for these cyber churches, the cyber church also aid in the creation of new communities of followers of Jesus, especially those who don't particularly like the church. The cyber churches also serve others in the form of leadership training.

This cyber ministry is a team ministry consisting of the main writer, the editor and the webmaster. Dries Lombaard is the editor, who heads the content management and vision, while Dries Cronje, is the webmaster, who looks after the technical side.



There are some of categories the cyber church use to reach out to its audience, and to serve their needs: Featured, Follower, Good News, Journey, Media, Powerful, Reasonate, Shorter and Whatever.

## **5.6. Description of the cyber church's components**

This section indicates some of the main ways the cyber church uses to reach out to its audience, and to serve their needs: Greetings, Guest (Visitor) Book, Chat Room, Sermon, Scripture, Music, Prayer and Information.

- **Greetings**

A brief but warm welcome is provided by a sound file with graphics. The greeting alert people to expect something from the cyber church. The greeting is important in the cyber church, even though it is a small part of the cyber church, because of the impact of the first contact with the graphics and the message. It has to be distinctive from other cyber churches, lest the people leave for another cyber place.

- **The chat room**

There are countless chat rooms in cyber space where people gather virtually. The chat rooms are a most useful element of cyber church – a web master of the cyber church says, "Christians like to talk!, the chat room is the head of Christianity online."

The chat room is especially useful with youth groups. Adults seem to be confused, because the text scrolls quickly down the screen. There are, however, some possibilities for a chat room with adults, with a limited number of two or three people at a time (Jewell 2004:94).

The specific features of the chat room are:

Live online discussions, instead of message boards;  
focused discussion on dozens of topics over time. The chat room can connect people with common interests to assist in the pastor's mentoring, counseling and discipleship (Edmiston: 2007). The chat room can be password protected, and provide a secure place where the people can gather virtually.

- **Preaching**

The cyber church has provided messages and sermons to pastors. People can listen to the voice of the pastor, but can also see the pastor on the screen from a video and sound file. The user of the cyber church can even listen and watch past sermons and messages from the cyber church. Church members can listen to their pastor's sermon, even though they couldn't attend the church on Sunday.

- **Music and scripture**

"One link on the cyber church says "Click here to listen and sing". The cyber church provides lots of Christian music such as CCM. People who connect with the cyber church can join in the singing as music is played and the words are displayed. The

user of the cyber church has the option of singing or listening. The cyber church also provides Scripture reading. Traditionally, Scripture is read by someone or all together in the worship service. In the cyber church the words of Scripture are also displayed, and online Bible reading is available from the cyber church.

- **Prayer**

The church regularly uses the cyber church to share prayer items. Recent visitors to the cyber church have asked prayers for people who are ill or grieving, people facing career decisions or relationship difficulties. It provides additional opportunities for people to engage in private, or not-so-private, prayer. The cyber church's prayer link to people and to entire congregations who stand ready to pray. Prayer requests spread rapidly all over the world through the internet. Its response is fast and numerous.

An example of a prayer request and it's response:

"Please join in prayer for three-year-old Nathan. His parents are missionaries in Kazakhstan, and three hours ago, Nathan fell into boiling water and has severe scalds over most of his body. The Beahlers don't believe he is going to live if immediate medical attention is not received. They are unable to find assistance in their area of Russia. If anyone can help them, please call or e-mail."

The message above was sent on January 23, when users of the cyber church received word through e-mail about Nathan Beahler's condition. After reading the

message, Hatch called his denominational missionary in Kazakhstan.

"When a staff member answered the phone and heard about the situation she said, 'That's where I live! I know an American doctor here.'" As a result, the doctor was contacted in time to stabilize the child and save his life (Christianity Today 1995: April 3).

In the past, spreading news of such a situation might have taken days, even weeks. However, computer communication has made it possible to relay messages instantly and, as a result, has changed the face of Christian mission.

- **Guest (Visitor) book**

The guest book provides an opportunity for users of the cyber church to sign on the cyber church with a greeting and a brief message. Sometimes non-Christians use this site to ask what they want to know about Jesus or Christianity. This guest book is part of the church's outreach.

- **Information**

These links provide answers to questions. It provides readers with knowledge about church history, theology and information on the Bible. If someone wants to know "What's a virgin means in the Bible?", the answer is available with a click on the

"Informational link". It is a help to our faith through the answers to theological and biblical questions.

The cyber church is playing an important and rapidly growing role in helping Christians to think about their faith. It gives access to a lot of biblical, theological and general information.

It is a help to pastors and church ministers<sup>60</sup>. Many people, including pastors and church ministers, do not remember exactly where a word or phrase stands in the Bible - with an approximate phrase, the computer will find it through the internet's<sup>61</sup> concordances of the Bible. Explanations of difficult verses or words in the Bible are also available<sup>62</sup>.

## **5.7. Characteristics of the cyber church**

The cyber space has negative and positive aspects. Its advantages and disadvantages will be indicated.

### **5.7.1. The advantage of the cyber church**

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<sup>60</sup> According to Dart (2001: 6), a striking number of pastors and church ministers have turned to the internet (cyber church) to get material for sermons, worship services, church-education programs, and their own personal devotions.

<sup>61</sup> "Bible Gateway <<http://bible.gospelcom.net/cgi-bin/bible>>": The Bible Gateway also offers seven different versions of the Bible in ten different languages.

<sup>62</sup> The cyber church has linked with many other research engines and web logs, known as blogs, which means we have access to all internet sites, while joining the cyber church.

- **Interaction**

People engage in the cyber church for many different reasons. Some may be more appropriate than others for interaction, which is one of the cyber church's advantages.

According to George (2006) the cyber churches are not only filled with boring sermons and texts, but includes elements such as a chat, bulletin or online group like bible study groups and a variety of discussion groups. This is not a "one way" or a "one to many" communication, but "two ways" and "many to many" communication (Hudd & Reimann 2006:62-63).

The primary principle of the conventional church<sup>63</sup> is that church members are taught while sitting to listen passively. The new principle of cyber churches is based on discussion, involvement and active participation. People who engage in the cyber church can reach a minister or a priest through e-mail 24 hours a day. The cyber church makes interaction available between pastor and church members through the cyber space.

In the church, both online and offline, the principle of interactivity means the engagement of all Church members in the worship service and to actively take part in the worship service and the church's ministry through interaction. This new principle, interaction, must apply to the 21st century church, not only online (cyber church) but also offline (conventional church) (Hudd & Reimann 2006:62).

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<sup>63</sup> I personally believe that the conventional church needs interaction between the pastor and the church members. This, I believe, is something we as church leaders and pastors can learn from the Internet cyber church.

- **Economical**

The cyber church is economically advantageous to the church. It can provide more information to more people more cheaply. Economically the cyber church allows people to form communities without buildings. That is to say, they don't need to spend money on buildings and their operating.

With a rising oil price church members can join a cyber church worship service, bible school and many other church programmes instead of driving long distances to church. People can use chat rooms in the cyber church, instead of making phone calls (Jewell 2004:94).

- **Cut off from noise**

The people joining the cyber church may feel more comfortable, without the need to keep children quiet during worship. Nobody makes a noise except the cyber church users themselves with small children, it is a struggle to keep them quiet in the worship service.

In the cyber church people don't need to pay their attention to children to keep them quiet. It is easy to focus on God, the word of God and the special program in the cyber church.

- **Easy to join**

None of the top cyber churches are graphically complex or require intricate user techniques. The cyber church is easily joined by a one click search, and a one click

file up-loading. It is available to old and young, male and female. If the user is uncomfortable with the program of the cyber church he/she can leave it at anytime.

- **Security**

While the chat room can be password protected and provides a secure place where people can gather virtually, people who live in or among other religions such as Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, are more free to explore religious questions without fear and terror. They can even share downloaded Christian material to others.

### **5.7.2. Disadvantages of the cyber church**

- **Separation from the church and from people**

The influence of the cyber space is increasing, and the number of cyber church users is growing rapidly. People do not need to go to church anymore, because of the cyber church. Cyber church users may feel that the cyber church is sufficient for them without the need to attend the church, especially with the many advantages of the cyber church.

- **The breakdown of the Christian community**

The church must be a community. Bible says, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matt. 18:20)." The community is the basis of church organization. The Bible also says, "Let us not give up meeting



together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10: 24-25)."

However, the basis of church organization is beginning to breakdown through the influence of cyber space. Meetings in cyber space are not person to person contact, but contact through an electronic machine like a computer and the internet. The community spirit is breaking down. These generations of cyber space users are meeting in cyber space, like in the internet chat room. Even Christians enjoy the cyber community. This breakdown of Christian community is one of the negative aspects of the use of the cyber space.

## **5.8. A cyber church model for the 21st century**

Proposal of a cyber church model for the 21st century churches. The four dimensions of understanding mission comprises the *kerygma, diakonia, koinonia* , *leitourgia* dimensions of gospel work.

Though each is related to the others, the distinction is useful and each of the categories will be discussed, as well as the different views on mission in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul.

### **5.8.1. *Missio Dei* and *Missio Ecclesiae***

The cyber church needs to remember that the first subject, the author of all mission, is the Triune God. According to the missionary message of the New Testament, all evangelists emphasize that mission is God's work, it is *Missio Dei*. Both the churches and the cyber church need to be reminded of a statement made by a South African church several years ago.

Mission is the action of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit with the whole world, through which He gathers a church for himself from the entire human race through his Word and Spirit (quoted in Kritzinger, Meiring, & Saayman 1994:41).

As important as the *Missio Dei* is, according to New Testament message about mission, the *Missio Ecclesiae* is also emphasized, the fact that God includes all Christians in his mission, that we become his co-workers on earth.

### **5.8.2. Models of *Kerygma***

The purpose of the church (cyber church) according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul is to proclaim (herald) the gospel or good news, calling people throughout the whole world to faith and emphasizing the power of the Word, to effect spiritual change. Proclamation is the centre of worship in the church and in the cyber church as well.

The purpose of the cyber church is the proclamation of the gospel or good news. The *kerygma* includes various forms of the ministry of the Word in mission: media evangelism, bible translation and distribution, etc.

*Kerygma* is the unfinished missionary task. In this world, there are still people who never heard the gospel (un-reached people). The church is called to make disciples of all nations, as Matthew and Mark remind us. And in spite of hearing the gospel, there are people who have no effective knowledge of the gospel. The *kerygma* is one of the important missionary tasks of the church to un-reached and reached people.

- **Preaching**

"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

There is no doubt that preaching was always one of the main missionary models. And preaching has been a remarkably fruitful missionary model. It communicates the gospel between preacher and hearer. It is a harvest, but also an opportunity for teaching and growth.

In the cyber space, the message has been pre-recorded and at the anytime can be provided to cyber church members wherever they are in the world. If they have a good computer and internet connection, they can hear the message. Most of the message materials in cyber space are able to be downloaded into the computer, and it is useful to share with the people.

- **Translation and distribution of the Bible**

In earlier years each missionary society and church usually had to translate and distribute the Bible. The translation of the Bible is perhaps the greatest fulfillment of modern mission. The Bible translation movement came from the necessity to communicate with people in their own language. The distribution of the Bible, as the Word of God, remains indispensable in Christian missions.

Many missionaries had to learn an unknown language, work out a written form for the language and translate the Bible. In this way many people obtained access to the Bible. Such translations are still appearing throughout the world. However, some people will never have the opportunity to read the Bible in their own language, because of their small numbers or geographical inaccessibility. Many organizations

focus on Bible translation for these people. The largest of these specialized organizations, is the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics established by Cameron Townsend.

Africa is one of the continents where about a half of all its languages still need a lot of pioneer work for Bible translations. Despite the risks and divisions among churches on translation errors and difference of interpretation, there is no other model of *kerygma* than Bible translation and its effect on the growth of the church world-wide.

Today the cyber church has to made it easier than before. The cyber space has provided useful software to translate and distribute the Bible through the internet.

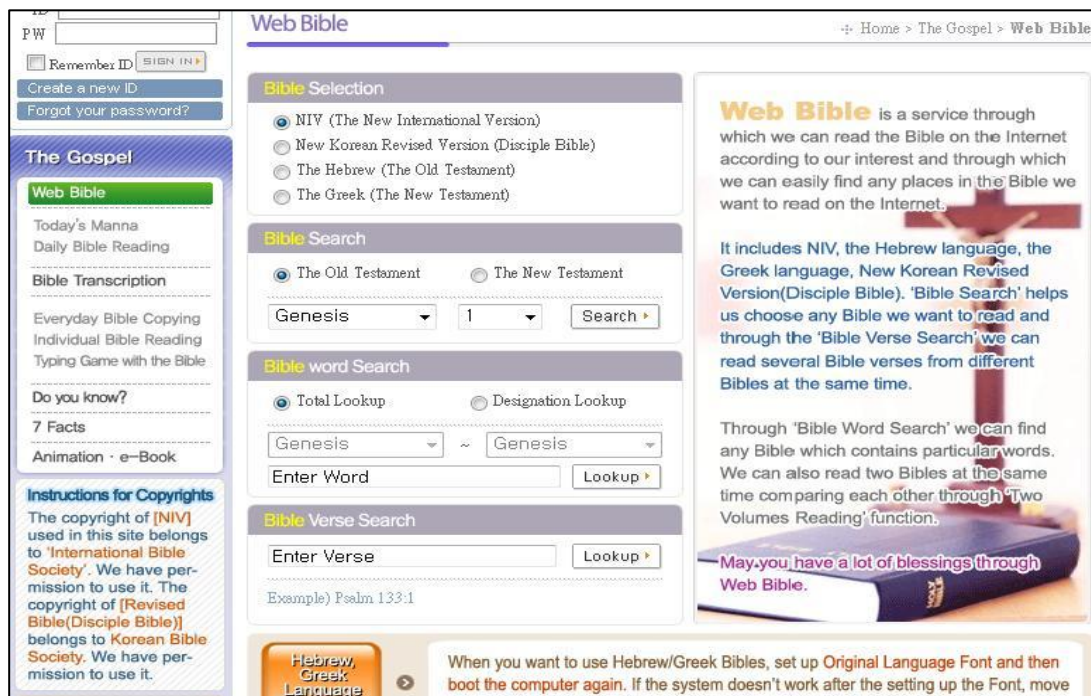


Figure 5.1. Web Bible in SaRang Community Church web site

- **Radio, television and literature via cyber church**

From the beginning of missionary work, the written word has played an important part in spreading the gospel. The church tries to communicate the message of Christ through regional distribution of Christian literature and through the use of electronic media, such as radio and television. This started because the church has realized the importance of this task. Radio, television and literature are very important missionary models that should have a link with the church.

The cyber church can operate broadcasting, such as radio and television, through the cyber space. This cyber broadcasting, enable suitable programs to be broadcasted to each mission field.



**Figure 5.2. Web Broadcasting in SaRang Community Church web site**

The use of literature and electronic media, such as radio and television, has become more imperative, because of the increasing numbers of people that can

read and write, the population explosion, and the fast rate of social, political and technological change.

- **Dialogue**

Dialogue is a literary and theatrical form consisting of a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people. However dialogue is a widely used concept in mission today (see chapter 4.4.).

Through the cyber church dialogue with different religions and cultures are easier than before. According to Max Warren's seven rules, for dialogue (chapter 4.4.1.), dialogue between Christians and non-Christians is possible in the cyber world where dialogue has become a matter of extreme importance. Most cyber activities are formatted for personal dialogue. Warren's special rules for dialogue are to adopted for today.

### **5.8.3. Models of *Diakonia***

Jesus Christ, by precept and example, stressed the importance of ministering to the physical, social, cultural, and political needs, as well as spiritual and moral needs of a person. For all three synoptic evangelists - especially Luke (Lk. 4:16-30) - this is a *sine qua non*. For this reason, Jesus Christ came not only as a person who proclaimed, but also as one who served (*diakonia*).

The Service Mission model seeks to stress the fact that Jesus Christ became incarnated into the world as a man who served. It is necessary, for the church to reach out to the poor and sick people through charity projects. *Diakonia* is one of the important missionary works in the church and in the cyber church.

Different *diaconal* services are:

- **Education**

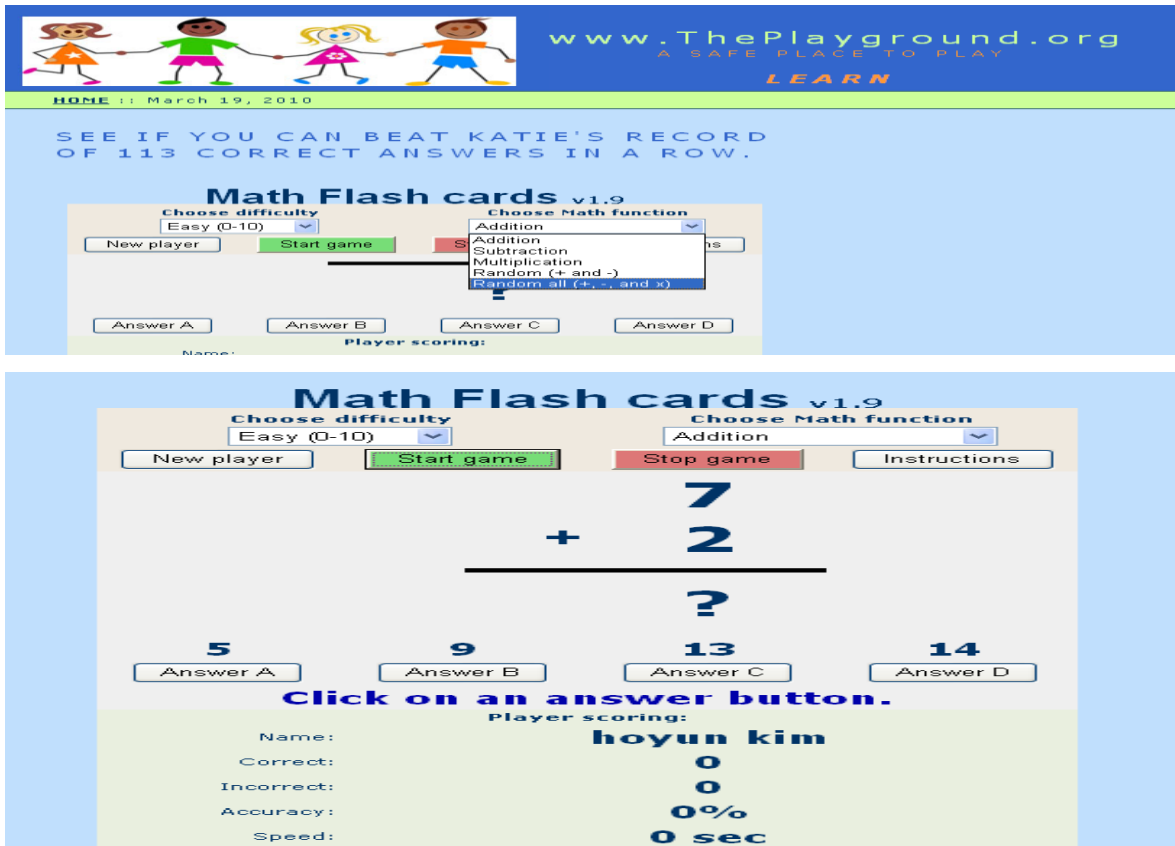
The first model of Service Mission (diaconal) is education. Education ranks as the oldest model of Service Mission (diaconal) in the modern history of missions.

The missionaries couldn't conceive the mission without educating people to read and write and to give them the Bible and other literature to read. Because the missionaries came from a book (Bible)-culture. This was the beginning of education in the modern history of missions. Education made it possible for people to read, write and study the Bible, in their own language. Through mission education many people became Christians. Today, education is also available through the cyber church. Some of churches provide computer lessons and language, especially English, through the cyber church.



**Figure 5.3. Education in Bridge sites**

Some Christian web sites provide math education and games to students.



**Figure 5.4. Math education in cyber space: [www.ThePlayground.org](http://www.ThePlayground.org)**

- **The ministry of justice**

The ministry of justice as part of the missionary service (*diakonia*) is emphasized today. It is also the responsibility of the cyber church for the whole world. The ministry of the cyber church is not only to bring the gospel to all people in the entire world, and to teach them to obey all Jesus' commandments (Matt. 28:18-20), but also to oppose all injustices.



Because Jesus' ministry was one of practicing justice and mercy (Lk. 4:18-19),<sup>64</sup> it also indicates the relationship between evangelism and the ministry of justice. Therefore the whole cyber church must follow Jesus with a prophetic voice against injustice in society, and listen to the Word of the Lord.

There are many hyperlinks for social justice in cyber church. Through these links users can have a great opportunity to join the social justice programs. Some of the web sites of the international justice mission are the following:

“The International Justice Mission is a human rights agency that secures justice for victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression ([www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org))”. There are special extended sessions focusing on AIDS. According to the International Justice Mission web site, evangelicals are often caricatured as only being concerned about saving souls and spreading the gospel. But the emphasis should be on global justice.

#### **5.8.4. Models of *Koinonia***

The term *koinonia* is used for the task of building up the body of Christ to maturity according to Matthew 28:16-20. Jesus told his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you". Mission has everything to do with the building up of the church of Christ, of establishing and empowering the body of Christ on earth. This will involve striving for the expression of ecumenical co-operation, unity and brotherly relations as well.

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<sup>64</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:18-19).

Being involved in mission and evangelism does not necessarily mean planting churches. Many Christian activities are labeled as evangelism and missionary work, but in reality such activities have nothing to do with bringing people to Christ or planting churches.

The goal of mission as given by our Lord Jesus Christ is to make disciples of all nations as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. How does cyber mission do church planting?

Church planting has always been an important model of the *koinonia* mission. According to Voetius, a Dutch theologian belonging to the seventeenth century Second Reformation school of Dutch theologians, the planting of the church is the intermediate goal of mission.

- **The church growth**

The goal of mission is to win people for Christ and to make disciples of all nations according to Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

Worshipping groups or new congregations should be formed, so that new believers may interact with one another in worship, prayer, Bible study and witnessing through the cyber church. New believers, in turn, bring others to Christ through their witnessing.

"Church growth" means not only a growth in the numbers of believers and the multiplication of churches, but also the spiritual growth of believers and organizational growth of churches. Any healthy cyber church must have growth in these and other areas.

- **Ecumenical co-operation**

Ecumenical co-operation is necessary for the missionary enterprise to the world, because missionary work is the ecumenical calling of the whole cyber church in the world. Missionary work is not a competition between cyber churches.

The cyber church provided contact and deepened relationships with a wide range of Christians and churches. Through the cyber network, the Methodist, Catholic, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches, as well as other Christians, can become one. It is one of the means of enabling Christians to stand together for truth.

The internet web site, cyber church, became an important source of news for the church internationally, and to some extent for the international press about what was happening in the world (South Africa, South Korea, Mozambique and Japan). Therefore we can help one another to pray for the different challenges that we are facing in our situations through the cyber church.

It is God's mission (*Missio Dei*), his self-revelation as the One who loves the world. The point of missionary work is the good news of God's love. Therefore, neither a secularized cyber church, nor a separatist cyber church can faithfully articulate God's mission, because every missionary work belongs to God.

The ecumenical co-operation movement is not only historically linked to the world-wide missionary enterprise of the cyber church, but also in principle. Ecumenical co-operation on the mission field is necessary to sustain and enlarge the missionary future. Therefore, the cyber space is a good tool for God's mission.

- **Specific examples of *Koinonia* in the cyber mission**

Although cyber space provide much that is useful it does not build community. Community requires interaction and relationships.

But cyber space provides several interactive tools that Christians can use to build communities: chat rooms, web board, e-mail discussion and interactive Bible studies.

### **Chat rooms**

Chat rooms allow many people to interact with each other. Chat rooms<sup>65</sup> are popular with teenagers. The church can use these chat rooms to build the church community.

### **Web board**

Web boards are arranged into topics by its moderator. Each of these topics consists of various conversations. The moderator makes a statement or a question, and users (members) reply to a statement or a question.

The church can use a web board to build up the church community. They can share church life or spiritual life with other members. Usually the web board users give nicknames rather than their real names. Therefore people join easily, and read and add to it at any time. Web board is a good community building tool.

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<sup>65</sup> In the chat room, two or three conversations are going on at once, however we sometimes find people that are dealing with real issues and looking for help, while others have meaningless conversations.

## **E-mail discussion**

Church members begin to know each other through their e-mail discussions, and to trust one another. Ultimately church members begin to share some of the real issues they are struggling with. Church members in e-mail discussion groups encourage one another both publicly and privately through prayer support, and they feel to be a real spiritual family. E-mail discussion is a special interactive community building tool in cyber space.

## **Interactive Bible studies**

The internet is a good medium for communicating the gospel. The internet is a very effective platform to teach the Word of God. Bible studies, sharing questions over the weekend, and sending out questions to be discussed each day are not one-way but interactive Bible studies. It is a useful interactive tool for Bible studies and building community.

## **5.9. Conclusion**

This chapter explored the community in the context of current missionary thinking and proposed a model for the cyber church of the 21st century churches. It has also shown that cyber communities will continue to grow and develop, to become an increasing part of the identity of many people.

Because cyber communities are a tool for both good and ill, Christians must find ways of using cyber communities for good, as a vehicle for mission. Chapter 6 will explore the South Korean church and how they are using the cyber community in their mission.