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Computer Mediated Communication: Providing Pastoral Care to Youth in "A High Tech" World

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COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION:
PROVIDING PASTORAL CARE TO YOUTH IN "A HIGH TECH" WORLD

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This study used a hermeneutical methodology to explore how Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can be used to provide pastoral care to youth in a high tech world. The research was motivated by the writers desire to find ways to be in communication with youth and provide pastoral care to them during their adolescent years. The thesis will explore computer mediated communication and its usefulness in providing pastoral care to youth by exploring the benefits and limitations, how it can be abused, namely cyber bullying, how it can provide an opportunity for mentoring and a theological reflection on how it can work in the church. The hermeneutical research leads the reader through information on CMC, the hazards of using this type of technology and the benefits that this technology lends for providing pastoral care in the parish.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

One of my increasing frustrations in pastoral ministry, is the disconnect between

pastor, youth and congregation, which occurs once a youth completes confirmation

classes. Confirmation classes are seen as a type of graduation from church, and youth

often find themselves no longer participating in the life of the congregation.

There are many reasons for this disconnection: part-time jobs, school,

extracurricular activities, love interests, and peer pressure. With all these changes going

on in the young person's world, it is more important then ever, to make sure that they

have supportive people in their life which they can approach if they need some help

maneuvering through the chaotic years of adolescence.

For a while now, I have been trying to discern how to stay in communication with

the youth in the congregation. Since messages were often being left on telephones, with

no response from the youth, I made a decision to enter into their world of

communication. So instead of trying to bring the youth to me, in communication, I

decided to go to them. The medium I chose to use was Computer Mediated

Communication (CMC). Computer Mediated Communication is a popular means for

communication now with cell phones, Blackberries, and computers, all of these are the

newest form of staying in contact and the fastest way of connecting with someone.

Over the last couple of years, I have been trying new ways to communicate with

the youth in the congregation through computer mediated communication, and it has

pushed me to ask the question, 'Is computer mediated communication a reliable way to

provide pastoral care to youth in a high tech world?' This paper will take a look at how CMC can indeed be used to provide pastoral care to youth in a high tech world.

There are many angles with which one could approach this area of interest; my goal is to take a philosophical and hermeneutical approach to the research. Hermeneutical research is defined as research that "starts with a question or a thesis and then utilizes the written texts to answer the question or prove or disprove the thesis" (VanKatwyk, 2003, p.148). VanKatwyk (2003) continues, "Hermeneutical research in spiritual care is not limited to the Bible or any other theological material. The texts also include the extensive writings from medicine, psychiatry, psychology, family therapy, sociology, and many other fields…it has also expanded the notion of written texts to include human experience" (p.148). In this paper, I will examine written texts on mentoring, bullying, computer-mediated communication, and theology in order to study the role of CMC for providing pastoral care to youth and then provide insight from personal experience to address the texts and the thesis statement.

There has been much written on the use of computer mediated communication in the counselling field, in the school system, and as a form of mentoring, especially with inner city youth, but there has been very little information written on the use of computer mediated communication within the church, as means of providing pastoral and spiritual care to members in the congregation. Some of the questions I will be exploring are:

1. What are the benefits and shortfalls of using Computer Mediated Communication (specifically focusing on Asynchronous and Synchronous Chat)?
2. What are the ethical and confidentiality issues in using computer mediated communication?
3. What makes the use of computer mediated communication more appealing then a face to face conversation?

4. With the rise of Internet Bullying, can there be a form of support offered and made available to youth to deal with bullies by using computer mediated communication?
5. What is the role of mentoring when using computer mediated communication?
6. What is the role of the pastor? What are youth looking for in terms of support?

Using these questions as starting points, I hope to discover and show that using computer mediated communication is not only a reliable means to engage youth and provide pastoral care, but also an important and meaningful means to connect with busy youth of today. In my thesis, I propose that there are many benefits to using computer mediated communication to communicate with youth in the church and that it can provide meaningful encounters of pastoral care, mentoring and fellowship. Attention will be given to both the benefits and concerns around using computer mediated communication; how the technology may be misused, in the case of internet bullying, and how the technology may be beneficial, in the case of providing opportunities for mentoring, especially in the context of parish ministry. In the final chapter of the paper, I discuss the pastoral implications for using CMC in the parish context.

Chapter 2

WHAT IS COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (CMC)?

"PT (Pastor Tanya), when are you going to start using *MSN Messenger[1]* and

Facebook[2] to communicate with us?" This question was asked to me a few years ago by

a youth in the congregation, who was discovering new means of communicating with her

peers and she wanted me to join in on the fun. I began to do some research on these two

forms of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and how they provide new

opportunities for communication among young people. This chapter examines the

different forms of Computer Meditated Communications that are available, the benefits

and limitations of using CMC and the privacy, and ethical and legal issues surrounding

the use of CMC.

Asynchronous and Synchronous forms of CMC

Asynchronous chat is a form of computer mediated "communication that does not

take place in 'real time' but rather whenever the participants have a chance to respond to

one another" (Rochlen, Zack, Speyer, 2004, p.270). An example of asynchronous chat

would be using e-mail or a program such as *Facebook (see Appendix A)*, to communicate

with youth. Alternatively, synchronous chat "takes place in real time, often using free,

chat-based interfaces (e.g. AOL Instant Messaging, ICQ, and MSN Messenger (see

Appendix B)) (Rochlen et al., 2004, p.270)." So as soon as one party has typed out their

message and hits the return/enter key, in the conversation box, the receiver receives the

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[1] A CMC program created by Microsoft Corporation, copyright 1997-2006.
[2] A CMC program created by Mark Zuckerberg. "Facebook is a social utility that connects people with
friends and others who work, study and live around them. People use Facebook to keep up with friends,
upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet"
(http://www.facebook.com/about.php - views August 22, 2007).

message instantly and is able to respond in real time. It allows both parties the opportunity to respond immediately to comments being made. Both of these programs offer possibilities for providing pastoral care to youth in congregations, but choosing to use asynchronous chat verses synchronous chat is a decision that the pastor would have to make based on their personal preference and on the research they have acquired about the two forms of CMC.

Benefits to Using Asynchronous and Synchronous Chat

There are many advantages to using CMC over face-to-face communication for providing pastoral care with youth, although the goal is never to eliminate the importance of face-to-face communication when providing pastoral care. CMC simply offers another venue for providing care to youth, who may not be able to or comfortable with participating in face-to-face communication.

One benefit of CMC is its convenience and increased access for both parties to communicate with one another. With an increase in busy schedules and time commitments, CMC offers an opportunity to communicate faster, without having to make and wait for an appointment, which may takes days or weeks to accommodate. With synchronous chat, the communication can happen immediately, and with asynchronous chat, the communication can occur outside of office hours, making opportunities for pastoral care more readily accessible. With an increase in accessibility, it also offers youth, who are unable to drive, or who live a fair distance from the church, the opportunity to access the pastor to find pastoral care. "Clients can communicate at their own convenience online – if they lead busy lives, have transportation problems, work

shift work/or have child care problems – when they may not have other access to face-to-face counseling services. This could apply equally to families living in rural, remote and metropolitan areas" (Hunt, 2002, p.261).

Another advantage to CMC is that face-to-face pastoral care may be intimidating, and CMC provides the youth with the opportunity to sit in the comfort of their own home, or in a place they deem safe and comfortable, and communicate more freely, instead of feeling like they are being stared at by the pastor. This benefit gives youth a chance to think through their thoughts more clearly before they begin to type a message on their computer, as opposed to feeling like they need to come up with an answer, because of time constraint or the awkwardness of sitting in a face-to-face encounter. "Email or interactive communication is usually the preferred option for clients who feel more comfortable self-disclosing online. Kids help line statistics reveal that there is a high demand for online services and that counselling emails included issues such as suicide, sexual assault, pregnancy, family relationships and mental health (Kids help line 200, see also Childress 2000, p.3; Murphy & Mitchell 1998 on self disclosure online)" (Hunt, 2002, p.261).

According to Hunt (2002), another benefit includes cost effectiveness (p.262). Aside from obtaining an internet connection with a local internet provider, asynchronous and synchronous chat programs are free to download. A key benefit, according to Rochlen et al. (2004, p.271) and Wright (2002, p.289), includes the concept of therapeutic writing. Many people find writing to be more freeing then trying to verbalize their thoughts, and CMC provides for that preference in personality.

Another benefit of CMC, according to Mallen and Vogel (2005), is that it reduces a potential for a power differential between the pastor and the youth (p.918). When using online communication, both parties experience equality. The youth is the expert in what the problem is and the pastor becomes someone who is willing to listen and assist the youth in figuring out what is the best means for dealing with the presenting problem. This also gives the youth a greater sense of responsibility and ownership in the discernment of what is best for them. Rochlen, Zach, & Speyer (2004) say,

> Some online therapists report anecdotally that relating through text-based self-disclosure can have the effect of inducing a high degree of intimacy and honesty from the first exchange of e-mail. At the same time, the power differential can be diminished, as both parties become co-authors of client insights (271).

There are many reasons as to why a pastor might want to look into using CMC to communicate with youth; the ones listed above are the most prevalent. However, there are also some limitations that should be considered as well.

Limitations to Using Asynchronous and Synchronous Chat

While there are many benefits to using CMC for interacting with youth and providing pastoral care, there are also some limitations to the technology which cannot be ignored. The first limitation, according to Collie, C˜ubranic and Long (2002), to using CMC as a form of communication with youth when providing pastoral care, is that one cannot rely on the non-verbal cues from the youth as an indicator of feelings surrounding the presenting issue (p.270). Hunt (2002) says, "text-based communication can be (but

need not be) harsher than verbal communication, in part because the non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice and body language, are missing from the communication" (263). The real challenge for the pastor is in regard to whether to use intuitive empathy or to analyze the written content provided. "As responsiveness cannot rely on intuitive empathy alone, why not let computers assist the therapist (pastor) or counselor? The technology is there to analyze the written content and to give hints about the emotional content" (Collie, Cubranic and Long, 2002, p. 901). Body language, facial expressions and the silent moments in face to face pastoral care are all very important in helping youth, but that is not to say that they are the only clues used in an assessment of the situation. Casper and Berger (2005) say, that while non-verbal information can have a negative impact in discerning what the youth's issue might be, it can also be positive, in that the pastor is freed from the pressure of giving a positive personal impression (p.904). When people meet for the first time, the first impression is often important and may help or hinder an opportunity to provide care. In using CMC, the risk of providing a bad first physical impression is decreased.

To build on the lack of non-verbal cues, another limitation of using CMC is that it may create the potential for misunderstanding the intended meaning, and so feelings can be hurt easily if the pastor misunderstands the intended comment of the youth. Rochlen, Zach, & Speyer (2004) say,

> For therapists (pastors) lacking appropriate training in text-based communication, important information about the client may remain 'between the lines,' with real issues evading assessment. The increased room for error in online assessment

makes traditional diagnosis virtually impossible and limits the clinician to making

provisional hypothesis (273).

In knowing this, the pastors awareness to be sensitive to those gaps is important and

therefore finding ways, such as being intentional about the asking of clarification

questions, to fill in the gaps would help in the communication. This would aid in making

sure that the gaps in information are decreased as much as possible.

A third limitation of CMC, according to Hunt (2002, p.263); and Collie,

C⁀ubranic and Long (2002, p.270) is the possibility of dealing with technical failure.

Computers, like any technology, have their limitations and are constantly being upgraded.

When using CMC, the internet provider may be having difficulties at their main office

which limits connectivity on your personal computer – this could lead to

miscommunication between pastor and youth, and leave a feeling of unimportance due to

the delay between communication, whether using asynchronous or synchronous

communication.

A fourth limitation to using CMC, is that lack of knowledge around e-English or

cyber-English, according to Al-Sa'Di and Hamdan (2005, p.409). With so many forms

of CMC, a new form of English has been created. It is a form of short hand specific to

computers and can be very confusing to first time users or amateurs. Examples of e-

English are: LOL (Laugh Out Loud), POS (Parent Over Shoulder), BRB (Be Right Back)

and many more. Many youth will write sentences leaving out the vowels in certain words

(i.e. r u going to the bsktbll gm? – Are you going to the basketball game). And as shown

in the previous example, it is also rare to see the use of capital letters, most e-English is

written in lower case letters, substituting numbers for letters (i.e. l8tr for later), and using

the most convenient shorthand possible. Also included in CMC e-English are emoticons. Emoticons are visual cues and pictures which express feelings and thoughts between the two parties (See Appendix C). Hunt (2002, p.264), and Rochlen, Zack, Speyer (2004, p.274), believe that a fifth shortcoming of CMC is the issue of confidentiality. With e-mail programs and synchronous chat programs being free of charge to download, they do not often carry with them sufficient security features. So files have the potential to be hacked into, which means that confidentiality has its limits. One way to secure confidentiality, in providing pastoral care to youth on line, would be to use the secure sites available, which often come with a cost. These secure sites use encrypted messages which prevent hackers from accessing files, passwords and personal information.

Privacy, Ethical Issues and Legal Issues Surrounding CMC

Privacy issues need special attention when using CMC for providing pastoral care with youth. "The basic values of professional ethics are beneficence, nonmaleficence, and at least in much of the Western world, autonomy. Therapists (pastors) should help and not hurt" (Hsiung, 2002, p.151). Pastors may choose to use their office computer to initiate communication with youth. While most computers require a password to log on, it can be bi-passed, which may open up saved chat logs of conversations had with youth, for anyone to access. As was mentioned before, there are encryption programs available to prevent anyone from accessing saved files, but a pastor needs to be willing to purchase and consciously use the encryption program in order for it to be successful. The issue of privacy can be taken one step further, according to Hunt (2002), if for some reason the CMC transcript is subpoenaed for legal purposes (p.263). Most computers automatically

save a copy of the online communication to a sub-folder on the computer. Hunt (2002) says, "The level of detail provided in contrast to case notes in face to face counseling sessions could leave organizations/practitioners(pastors) vulnerable to prosecution (Mackay, 2001; p.48) (p 263).

According to much of the hermeneutical research of online counseling, there are a number of ethical issues that a counselor, and more specifically for this study, a pastor must be aware of when embarking upon the use of CMC to provide pastoral care to youth. Such issues include the competence of the pastor regarding not only providing pastoral care but also the knowledge he/she has with online technology (which provides the ability to articulate to the youth the potential technical problems associated with using this type of medium for pastoral care). If the pastor is incompetent in either of these areas, the potential for doing harm is greatly increased, and this is not only unhelpful to the youth, but could open the pastor up to discipline on legal and ethical issues from the congregation they serve.

Other issues include informed consent, and emergency procedures. When dealing with youth under the age of eighteen, it important to know how to handle sensitive issues like the disclosure of suicidal ideation through computer mediated communication. When working with teenage youth, one practice to consider is informing the youth that if the pastor perceives in any way that they may hurt themselves, the pastor has a duty to them, to contact parents and medical personal to inform them of the potential threat of suicide. According to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2005), "The general requirement that counselors (pastors) keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is required to protect clients or identified others from serious of

foreseeable harm or when legal requirements demand that confidential information must be revealed"(7).

According to Hsiung (2002), there are many pros and cons when using the internet, in fact, it is much like using a double-edged sword (p.159). While the youth may enjoy the comforts and autonomy of sitting in their own home, at the computer, conversing with their pastor – one does have to recognize that there are limitations to the visual and auditory clues that may be important to the conversation. Having e-mail correspondences saved directly to your computer, provides you with a written record of the conversation, but at the same time, that information may be easily accessed by others if precautions, like encryption technology, are not used to secure the computer.

A pastor needs to practice diligence with the youth, the technology and maintaining the privacy of the conversation that uses computer-mediated communication, because often times the information is sensitive and the conversation is meant to be a private one between the pastor and the youth. Weighing the benefits and the limitations should be done by each individual pastor and the concerns of technology and duty of care need to be clearly articulated at the beginning of any and every conversation with the youth. This will limit any miscommunication or confusion which may occur with CMC.

Overall, if pastors are serious about connecting with youth in the congregation, they need to meet the youth where they are, and in today's day and age, that is in the world of computers and computer-mediated communication. However, it is also important to stay up to date on the changing and growing technology in order to provide the best care possible. Staying up to date means also being aware of the flaws that exist in CMC, specifically Internet Bullying which has become a big problem for youth today.

The following chapter takes a look at the effects of Internet Bullying and how it can

hinder youth wanting to participate in CMC for pastoral care.

Chapter 3

WHEN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IS NOT YOUR FRIEND!

There has been a growing conversation about whether or not computers have

made life easier or more difficult for people. In the case of computer mediated

communication (CMC), as a means of providing pastoral care to youth, there are times

when the computer can be used for positive interaction, and other times when the

computer will be abused to hurt people. In this chapter, the focus will be on how internet

bullying has been growing quickly and how experiences of online bullying may prevent

people from using computer mediated communication in a positive way. The chapter

gives comparisons between traditional bullying and cyber bullying; the psychological and

social impact cyber bullying has on youth today; the reason why cyber bullying is so easy

and appealing to some youth; and finally how cyber bullying can be prevented.

Traditional Bullying verses Cyber Bullying

There are many disciplines, in the realm of pastoral care and counseling, that have

defined bullying in many different ways, but the majority of definitions involve the

notion of a present power differential, harassment or violence, an intent to cause harm,

and a verbal or physical threat. Stephenson and Smith (1989) define bullying as,

> A form of social interaction in which a more dominant individual [the bully] exhibits
>
> aggressive behavior which is intended to and does, in fact, cause distress to a less
>
> dominant individual [the victim]. The aggressive behavior may take the form of a
>
> direct physical and/or verbal attack or may be indirect as when the bully hides a

possession that belongs to the victim or spreads false information about the victim.

(p.45).

Such bullying is seen on television, where a dominant individual bullies a less powerful individual to do his homework, or to give up his lunch money, or else they will get a beating after school. It is the kind of bullying that happens on the school playgrounds, or in the dark corners of the school halls. Face-to-face bullying also expands beyond the walls of schools into social gathering places like malls or food shops.

With the growth of technology, a new form of bullying has appeared – cyber bullying. Cyber bullying is, "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text. (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006, p.152)." This includes the use of personal computers (via asynchronous and synchronous chat programs[3]) and the use of cell phones via voice or text sent messages. The problem with using computer mediated communication for cyber bullying is that the less dominant individual or victim of bullying can no longer escape the harassment. "Youth were also asked for what activities they use the Internet most often and four categories were created to reflect communication-related activities: 1) chat rooms, 2) email, 3) Instant Messaging, and 4) all other activities (e.g., playing games, school assignments, downloading software)" (Yabarra & Mitchell, 2004, p.1311). Computers have made it possible for communication and bullying to occur twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, leaving the victim no chance of escaping the torment.

Studies show that people who were once considered playground bullies have now adopted CMC as their new means for inflicting harm on their victims, and that there has

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[3] Specific programs consist of e-mails, Web Sites, online forums, chat rooms, blogs, and instant messaging (Dyrli, 2005, p.63).

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been an increase in online aggressors over traditional aggressors because of the easy

access and anonymity of using CMC for bullying (though there is little research to

indicate the percentage of online bullies versus face-to-face bullies). Ybarra and Mitchell

(2004), in a recent study discovered that:

> Many youth involved in Internet harassment are also targets of conventional bullying.
> Over half of aggressor/targets (56%) report being the target of offline bullying, while
> 49% of aggressor-only and 44% of victim-only youth report similar experiences.
> These data also suggest however, that some youth are exclusively involved in
> harassment online. Thus, for some youth who are bullied, the Internet may simply be
> an extension of the schoolyard, with victimization continuing after the bell and on into
> the night. For other youth victims of conventional bullying, the Internet may be a
> place to assert dominance over others as compensation for being bullied in person.
> And for youth who are not involved in conventional bullying, the Internet may be a
> place where they take on a persona that is more aggressive than their in-person
> personality (p.1313).

Do the same criteria and definitions apply for online bullying versus face-to-face

bullying? Chu (2005) in an article for *Time Magazine* says, "Cyber bullying can mean

anything from posting pejorative items like the List of Hos[4] to spreading rumors by e-

mail to harassing by instant message" (p.52). According to Nelson (2003), "Cyber

bullying is often very serious, including stalking and death threats." Snider (2004), in a

Maclean's article stated that, "According to the Media Awareness Network, an Ottawa-

based non-profit group that monitors on-line activity, a quarter of young Canadian

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[4] List of Hos, in cultural context, refers to a list of individuals who are considered to be extremely promiscuous. Ho, is a slang term used to defined promiscuity.

Internet users report having received material that said hateful things about others. These can be threats, gossip or worse" (p.76).

Cyber bullying has taken on an identity of its own, creating emotional and psychological issues for the victim, and increasing the accessibility for the bully to needle their prey.

The Psychological and Social Impact of Cyber Bullying

For years, we have known that traditional bullying has had a psychological and social impact on those who have felt the effects of bullying in their lives. The question arising, with the increased use of CMC as a medium for inflicting bullying on a victim, is "What is the psychological and social impact of cyber bullying on victims?" Yabbara and Mitchell (2004), state, "Youth engaging in online aggression were identified based upon two questions: 1) making rude or nasty comments to someone on the Internet; and 2) using the Internet to harass or embarrass someone with whom the youth was mad" (p. 1310). What impact do these types of aggression have on the youth of today's computer world[5]?

With any type of bullying, but more prevalent with cyber bullying, "repeated victimization of students – through verbal or physical abuse - can cause psychological intimidation with immediate and long-term effects on the victim" (Brooks, Corder, & Marshall, 2006, p. 52-56).   Such long term effects can include depression, decreasing grades in school, missing classes, pretending to be ill in order to skip school, decreased

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[5] It is also important to note that, "The study of Internet harassment is still in its relative infancy and standardized methods for measuring the behavior have not yet been developed" (Yabbari & Mitchell, (2004), pp. 1308-1316). Therefore there is very little data on measuring the psychological and social impact of bullying and much of the research provided is either speculation or informed by the effects of traditional bullying,.

self-esteem which can lead to depression, becoming a trouble-maker at school and to the extreme – committing suicide (Penn, 2006, p17 & Limber, 2002, p.17).

Often times, cyber bullying goes unreported to parents or school officials. Dyrli (2005) says, "Even severe bullying incidents are commonly not reported by victims who feel the attacks are somehow their fault, or fear they may lose electronic communications privileges" (p.63). Somewhere, in the cross-over from traditional bullying to cyber bullying, victims have internalized the act of bullying upon themselves as though they may deserve it and because of this, they are afraid to speak up for fear of punishment or the loss of computer privileges at school and home. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) remind us that there is no clean separation between the public domain and home anymore. Some responses to victims of internet bullying are to turn off their computers and ignore the harassment (at least they can walk away from cyber bullying, they can't walk away from traditional bullying), but once they have been a victim of cyber bullying, it has already begun to affect them psychologically (p.155).

What is so appealing about Cyber Bullying and Who finds it appealing?

What is it about computer mediated communication that makes cyber bullying so appealing for youth and who are the youth that are most likely to use CMC in order to bully others? For many youth, using CMC to further bullying is appealing because it provides them with some anonymity. Snider (2004), in a *Maclean's* magazine, quoted an interview with "Bill Beasley, a father and education consultant in Cochrane, Alta, who runs websites about bullying, [and] has studied the growing phenomenon of cyberbullying and says the anonymity of the Internet emboldens the culprits. "When kids

feel there aren't consequences for the communications, they take liberties," says Beasley (p.21). Snider also says, "Through e-mail and over cellphones, tormentors can get right into victims homes, harassing them while their parents sit in the next room" (p.21). With the way computer mediated communication is currently configured, people are able to create anonymous e-mail accounts or on-line profiles in chat rooms that are not easily traceable. With these shadowy identities, bullies can attack their victims, without being called out, confronted and reprimanded, and for the victim there is an increase in the fear they experience because they have no idea who is harassing them. Chu, in his *Time (2005)* magazine article, quoted one youth as saying, "'I would never do anything in real life. I'm a good kid. But I can do it online because it doesn't matter'" (p.52).

A second reason youth offer to justify bullying other youth online is that they believe that their words really have little impact on the victim, after all, words are just words and actions speak louder then words (Wolfsberg, 2006, p.33). Patchin and Hinduja note, "It is not a stretch to say that physical harm – such as being beat up – might even be preferred by some victims to the excruciating pain they experience from nonphysical harm because the former can heal quicker" (p.8).

Finally, cyber bullying is rampant because there is very little supervision of youth while they are on computers. Often times, parents have no idea what their youth are doing on-line and some parents are not as educated in computer mediated communication and are unable to even recognize bullying should it be occurring.

There are programs and companies who try to police the communication which occurs on line, but with the magnitude of dialogues occurring daily, it is difficult to

monitor every conversation. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (2002) says,

> Although chat hosts regularly observe the dialog in some chat rooms in an effort to police conversations and evict offensive individuals, personal messages sent between users are viewable only by the sender and the recipient and are therefore outside regulatory reach. Furthermore, there are no individuals to monitor or censor offensive content in e-mail or text messages sent via computer or cellular phone. Another contributive element is the increasingly common presence of computers in the private environments of adolescent bedrooms. Indeed, teenagers often know more about computers and cellular phones than do their parents and are therefore able to operate the technologies without worry or concern that a probing parent will discover their participation in bullying (or even their victimization).

Therefore, unless parents take an active role in understanding the new communication technologies and in what their children are doing online and on their cell phones, bullying will continue to go unmonitored.

So, who exactly are these cyber bullies? Since computers are more readily accessible to many people in society and specifically to youth, anyone can become a cyber bully (Dyrli, 2005, p.63). And more times then not, most people who have been bullied, have found solace in bullying others on-line. (Dyril, 2005, 63; Penn, 2006, p.17). Penn (2006), say that "Studies indicate that girls receive more threats online or on their phones, than boys, and both male and female adolescents are in the most vulnerable age group. In Yabarra and Mitchell's Youth Internet Safety Study (2004) of Online Aggressor/Targets, they noted "Almost one in five (19%), young regular Internet users in

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the sample were involved in online harassment in some capacity within the previous year. Three percent were aggressor/targets. An additional 4% reported being targets of aggression, and 12% reported aggressive behavior towards others online[6]" (p.1311). For a taste of what's happening in Canada, Penn (2006) notes:

A 2005 study out of the University of Calgary [which] reported that 54 per cent of students have been bullied and, of those, a quarter of the students were cyberbullied. The study further found that the majority of cyber bullying victims did not report incidents. Bullies bank on the secrecy of their targets, people who are emotionally traumatized into silence (p.17).

Cyber bullies seek a reaction from their victims. They want to be engaged and responded too, because in the responding, the bully knows that they gained the upper hand of power and can continue with the harassment (Penn, 2006, p.18).

What makes a good target for cyber bullies? Penn (2006), has comprised a list of things that make some youth instant targets for cyber bullying:

- Students who lack attention or affection;
- Lonely and isolated students with no friends;
- Students who don't belong or fit in with their peers;
- Students who are new to or curious about the rules of on-line behaviour;
- Teens who are confused over their sexual identity or who are perceived by others to have a different sexual orientation;
- Youngsters who are easily tricked;

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[6] The Youth Internet Safety Survey is a cross-sectional, nationally representative telephone survey of young regular Internet users in the United States. One thousand, five hundred and one regular Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 years were interviewed, along with one parent or guardian

- Students who are fascinated with subcultures distinct from their worlds;
- Loners, both angry and disconnected, who are attracted to on-line hate groups; and
- Obese students (p.17).

All and all, if someone wants to be a bully on-line, the access to victims is plentiful and easy to access. As for the victims and parents of victims, there needs to be more education and research conducted on how to recognize, handle and prevent cyberbullying.

Can Cyber Bullying be prevented?

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "To educate a man [sic] in mind and not morals is to educate a menace to society" (Penn, 2006, p.18). Cyber bullying can be prevented if CMC users take the time to become educated on its threat and to educate children that it is not okay to be bullied offline or online. Schools, churches, internet cafes, all need to be alert that cyber bullying is happening and create safe places for youth to go and discuss how they are feeling about it, and what can be done to stop it.

The first obstacle to be overcome has to do with education for parents. Snider (2004) says, "Parents and kids relate to technology very differently. Most adults approach computers as practical tools, while for kids the Internet is a lifeline to their peer group"(p.77). Parents use computers to correspond for business purposes, send e-mails, and look up information on the internet. Youth, on the other hand, use CMC to stay connected with their friends, when they are not able to be in physical proximity to each other, for some, it becomes a life line. This becomes extremely easy for youth who have personal computers in the bedrooms and there is very little or no parental control over the

frequency and context of use. If parents were more intentional over monitoring what their children are doing, then perhaps the number of cyber bullying accounts would decrease. Of course, parents also have to be careful about how they react when they discover that their son or daughter is being bullied. Chu (2005), says,

> A parent's instinctive response may be to apply an electronic tourniquet, cutting off a teen's access. But experts agree that severing online links is not the solution. 'The Internet is no longer just an advantage. A child is at a disadvantage not having it,' says Brittany Bacon, an FBI-trained WiredSafety.org volunteer. She says teens need to learn boundaries and manners in cyberspace just as they must in other venues of society (p.53).

Youth in today's society need to be educated about cyber bullying, specifically that it is not just an unfortunate part of being an adolescent, but that it is a dangerous form of harassment that is unacceptable in any occurrence of life. It is also important to note that under Canada's Criminal Code, bullying is considered a punishable crime. Penn (2006) says that we need to:

> Inform students that under Canada's Criminal Code, it's a crime to repeatedly send messages that cause people to fear for their safety or the safety of others. An on-line death threat is a criminal offense. It is also a crime to publish statements intended to hurt and insult people or injure their reputations. When is cyber bullying considered a violation of the Canadian Human Rights Act? When messages of hate and discrimination are spread based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or disability. Such messages are illegal and punishable (p.18).

With so many negative implications for using CMC to provide pastoral care to youth, such as misuse of the technology, lack of parental monitoring, and the ability to remain anonymous in online bullying, many may shy away from this resource and ignore the positive opportunities that CMC can offer to youth who are seeking pastoral care. However, with any new venture, one must do their research and be knowledgeable about safety issues and assess the pros and cons of using any new program. The following chapter will explore how CMC may create a positive experience for youth who are looking for pastoral care, through the opportunity of mentoring.

Chapter 4

THE ROLE OF MENTORING: HOW COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

CAN BE A POSITIVE TOOL OF INFLUENCE IN PASTORAL CARE WITH

YOUTH.

With the possibility of youth and adults being disconnected from their

communities due to increasing mobility involving distancing from relatives, and

segregation of age levels, this disconnectedness can lead to a lack of learning (in terms of

education and personal life experience), a lack of motivation to become productive

citizens, and involvement in self-destructive activities (Segawa, 1993). One way to keep

youth connected and motivated in society is to introduce them to mentoring programs.

Mentoring programs have been in existence for hundreds of years. The first written

notion of mentoring can be found in Homer's book, *The Odyssey*. Homer has a character

named "Mentor" in his epic story dated back to 800B.C. According to Dubois and

Karcher (2005),

> Mentor was a trusted friend of Odysseus, the king of Ithica. When Odysseus went to
>
> fight in the Trojan War, Mentor served as friend and council to Odysseus's son
>
> Telemachus. The image of the benign helper has been enduring. Indeed, wherever
>
> and whenever an older and more mature guide provides direction to a younger charge,
>
> it is likely in today's society to be described as mentoring (p.14).

Thousands of mentoring programs have been created and are still in existence. These

programs find meaningful ways to provide mentoring opportunities for youth. This

chapter will discuss definitions of mentoring, and focus on the specific role of an adult-

youth mentoring relationship: "What does each party look for in a mentoring relationship?" "How can the mentoring relationship continue to grow over time?" The chapter will also discuss the importance of mentoring from a Christian perspective and what is the role of computer mediated communication in mentoring?

What Is Mentoring?

Margaret Cargo (2002), in her review of Jean Rhodes book, *Stand By Me,* says, "Mentoring finds its place in the special intergenerational relationship that forms between an adult and a youth, a relationship that is nurtured by the provision of ongoing guidance, emotional support and encouragement" (p.152). Fowler (2002) adds,

Mentoring can be defined as a nurturing process in which one or more skilled or experienced persons serves as a role model to teach, sponsor, encourage, counsel, and befriend a less skilled person. Mentoring relationships can be divided into those that evolved naturally (informal mentoring) and those that were created by an organization (formal).

When working with youth in church congregations, Lawrie (2005), gives this definition for mentoring,

Mentoring provides a forum for young people to question and explore the way they are living and the beliefs they are developing. It's a safe place for practicing living in a different way. Having a mentor is an opportunity for young people to learn faith through watching and walking alongside a person of faith. They watch how a Christian works through issues, make decisions, and lives a life of spirituality and

discipleship. They see how faith can be integrated into life, and they are challenged

to do likewise in their own lives (p.6).

Essentially then mentoring seeks to establish a relationship, between at least two people, where learning, support, listening and mutual respect are key components of a healthy mentoring relationship.

The Role of Mentoring

As with the many definitions for mentoring, there are also many programs and guidelines available for being in a mentor/mentee relationship. Youth of today, while trying to detach from their parents, still seek input from adults whom they trust and respect (Grossman & Bulle, 2005, p. 788). Grossman & Bulle (2005) go on to say,

In general, youth who find adults other than their parents to guide them through their

adolescent years have better outcomes in terms of scholastic success, social-

emotional well-being, connections to social capital, and risk-taking behavior. This is

true regardless of who the adult is—a teacher, coach, neighbor, pastor, counselor or

friend (p.790).

Many youth are looking for people who are willing to listen to them, hear their concerns and questions instead of talking at them, and by telling them what to do and how to do it. This is important for making a mentoring relationship successful. Dubois & Rhodes (2006) believe there is a, "need for adults to find ways to provide needed structure and guidance while supporting youth's development as agents of their own growth" (p.653). Therefore mentors, in relationship with mentees, need to be conscious that the relationship is not a one-way connection, but rather a connection that is shared by two

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people, taking into account, feelings, opinions, questions, and the dreams of both people in the relationship.

According to Lawrie (2005), mentoring involves modeling and practicing. Both parties learn and model for the other, life skills which honor the shared experiences and then offer opportunity to reflect on them. It involves an opportunity for both people to make meaning in life. And it offers the possibility of helping youth recognize that they are not alone in the world, and that their input about worldly issues, is not only important but needed (pps 9-10).

Some of the mentoring research has pushed the traditional view of the adult mentoring the youth, to focus on the importance of the role of the youth in the relationship. While the adult in the relationship may have more life experience, that is not to say that the life experience of the youth is less significant and therefore it needs to be acknowledged in the relationship. Larson (2006), believes that mentoring should, "focus on the concept of youth as producers of their own growth and what it means for mentoring. As parents, teachers, policy makers, and mentors, we still (as did my early adolescent self) want to control and mold youth." (p.678). He continues,

Young people are agents who have tremendous built-in potential for growth. But there are a lot of asterisks and qualifications in the road to this growth. For youth to be producers of their own development, first, their internal motivation needs to be activated and sustained: youth need to experience ownership and gradually develop greater ability to regulate this agency. Second, this agency needs to be directed in ways that are consistent with development of well-being and constructive participation in society. The role for mentors in this process of positive development

is more difficult than their old role of shaping youth. It is easier to think about

molding clay than about helping the clay mold itself. The new paradigm requires us

to replace a linear process, in which action moves from adult to youth, with a process

that is interactive (p.682).

In viewing Larson's points, the adult should realize when they need to act like the adult,

and that will mean that at times, the adult will have to ask difficult questions and push the

youth to think about the bigger picture and not just about themselves. A mentor will need

to figure out:

• When to set firm boundaries and when to be flexible
• When to support a youth's goals and when to challenge them
• How to grant youth choice and autonomy without putting them at risk
• When to listen and be empathic and when to give one's own point of view
• When to let youth learn from mistakes (Larson, 2006, p.683).

Larson (2006), states, "Mentoring relationships provide a special opportunity for adults to

balance this two-part role. A characteristic feature of mentoring relationships is that they

involve mutual trust. After a period of relationship building, mentees typically begin to

see their mentor as someone who cares about them and on whom they can rely" (p.683).

Mentoring relationships are important for both youth and adults. In terms of

mentoring in a church setting, there are some other perspectives, like ones faith

experience and how meaning in made, that is worth considering, especially if the pastor

(in this case acting as mentor), chooses to use CMC as a main medium for providing

guidance to and with youth.

Mentoring from a Christian Perspective

Throughout Christian Scriptures, there are a number of mentoring relationships that one can use in discerning how best to begin and maintain a mentoring relationship. King David had Nathan as a mentor, Ruth was mentored by Naomi, Peter's mentor was Jesus, and Timothy had not one, not two but three mentors – his mother, grandmother and Paul. Each of these mentees had the opportunity to learn from the worship and past experiences of those who came before them. Scriptural references that may be useful for the mentor to read include Matthew 28:18-20 and Ephesians 4:11-16 (see Appendix D). In Matthew's gospel Jesus encourages his followers to go out into the world and make disciples of all people, by baptizing them in the name of the Trinity, teaching them to obey Christ's commandments and promising that Jesus, himself, will be with them in their encounters. Jesus becomes the ultimate mentor for those who are looking to share their faith with the world. In Ephesians 4, Paul writes about the gifts that have been bestowed upon humanity, gifts that vary, depending on the individual, but gifts equally important for the whole of humanity. Paul says that some will teach, some will pastor, some will evangelize, some are prophets and apostles, but all are called to equip people for ministry – for building up Christ's body – until all know the unity that faith brings and all embody Christ's love for the world.

Ropp (1993) gives a portrait of what a Christian mentor looks like: he/she has a strong faith commitment to God where the person is intentional in deepening that commitment, integrity of faith commitment which can be demonstrated, active participation in a community of faith, genuine love for youth and a willingness to spend time with them, accepting of others, comfort with one's own identity and a sense of

mission (what is my role in the bigger picture of Christ's community) (pps. 5-6). Ropp then gets to the heart of the matter by articulating what the role of the mentor is in relationship to a youth.

1.   *A mentor is a giver of unconditional love.* First and foremost, a mentor has the opportunity to share with a youth, the unconditional love God has for humanity and the mentor can be a tangible witness to that love, in the way they care for and interact with the youth.

2.   *A mentor listens and hears.* Adults can be really good at telling youth what to do, but pay little attention to what the youth have to say. A dedicated mentor will not only talk to the youth, but they will also listen to what the youth has to say, and value the input the youth offers to the relationship.

3.   *A mentor is genuinely human.* Youth need to see, that adults do not have all the answers and that adults are not perfect, they too make mistakes. If a youth can see the human quality in their mentor, they will be more inclined to want to be in relationship with their mentor, as someone they can relate to and who can share in their experiences.

4.   *A mentor is a prayer partner.* Praying for the youth being mentored, in good times and times of difficulty, reflect the need for God to be a part of ones whole life. It also serves as a reminder that there are three people in the mentoring relationship – mentor, youth and God.

5.   *A mentor helps youth reflect and learn from their experiences.* Mentors can help youth reflect on their experiences, giving them a chance to process the experience, ask questions and seek their own answers to important life

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questions. A mentor can challenge the youth to see things from different perspectives, encouraging them to see the experience from different angles.

6. *A mentor supports parents.* A mentor should never be seen as the parental figure for the youth. However, a mentor can support the ministry of the parents – by encouraging communication at home, and supporting the family values.

7. *A mentor is an advocate for youth in the church.* Youth seek to be a part of the community they worship in, and a mentor can help them articulate their gifts, their spiritual needs, and their role in the congregational family.

8. *A mentor is there for caring support.* Everyone needs supports at some point in their life, and youth are no different. Support can include encouragement, caring, someone to walk with them through life, and a trusted confidant.

9. *A mentor helps youth learn about and take responsibility.* Youth learn about responsibility, by mimicking the actions of the adults around them. If they see adults acting responsibly, a model is created for them to copy (of course the opposite is also true). We learn responsibility by making mistakes and experiencing the consequences, and youth will learn the same way. A mentor can be a safe place for them to talk about responsibility.

10. *A mentor helps youth develop healthy self-esteem.* If we feel good about ourselves, we are better able to serve God and one another. A mentor can provide encouragement so that the youth can discern how they feel about their experiences, and the mentor can then help them work through their feelings –

this prevents the youth from feeling alone in the world and living with a low self-esteem.

11. *A mentor helps a youth discern God's image within.* In the book of Genesis, we read that humanity was created in God's image. A mentor can help youth recognize who they are and whose they are – that at the very centre of our being is God and God is love, a love that we can share with the world.

12. *A mentor helps in healing.* Hurt and pain are something we all experience in life, and an important role of the mentor is to provide a safe place for healing to occur, when the youth has been physically, emotionally or mentally hurt. Jesus was a wonderful model of healing for humanity – seeking out the downtrodden and providing a word of hope.

13. *A mentor is a suffering servant.* Being a mentor is not an easy thing. It carries with it a tremendous responsibility, a responsibility to deal with difficult situations, painful revelations, and frustrating moments. Youth will not always make good decisions, and a good mentor will need to remain calm, compassionate and caring in their support of the youth.

14. *A mentor challenges and encourages youth to listen and respond to Christ.* Mentors have the role of encouraging youth to listen for God speaking to them in their lives, not only listening for God to speak, but also helping youth understand what God is saying and discern how they will respond to God's voice (pps.7-11).

Ropp (1993) sums up his extensive list of the role of the mentor by saying this, "the role of the mentor is *to be the skin of Christ to a young person"* (p.11). A mentor has many

roles to maintain in the mentoring relationship, all of which are important in providing a

safe place for youth to seek out companionship, a listening ear, and someone they can

trust with their life questions and concerns. Lottes (2005), affirms Ropp by stating,

> As we engage students and others in pressing questions of life, we will be stretching
>
> them – and sometimes ourselves as well – in ways that help them see God more
>
> clearly as their partner in a life adventure that is indeed 'born from above.' In the
>
> process of addressing these questions, lives are changed, faith is deepened, and light
>
> shines where there is darkness (pps. 129-130).

The Christian mentoring relationship is about all people involved, finding their way in

life, with God at the center of life. How individuals make meaning in their lives, will be

impacted greatly by their understanding of God's active participation in their lives,

through the influence and encounters of other people. Youth are asking questions such as

"Who Am I?", "What is my role in life?", and "Am I loved?", and creating a Christian

mentoring relationship allows for a safe place for them to explore these questions. Lottes

(2005) maintains,

> In our dialoguing with young adults, we have the same opportunity that Jesus had to
>
> give the gifts of time and space and confrontative listening, as we desire to
>
> understand their questions and concerns. Not only does that build and honor
>
> relationships, but we ourselves grow in the process (p.131).

The mentoring relationship is no longer just about finding their way through the trials of

secular life, but allowing for the mentor and mentee to integrate their faith experiences

into everyday life and allowing their faith to be an active participant in how they make

meaning in their lives.

Computer Mediated Communication and Mentoring

With the increase in the use of computers, the technology offers another venue for participating in the mentoring of youth. Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, and Taylor (2006) state,

With the development of technology, particularly the increased access to the Internet among all segments of society, e-mentoring (variously known as *e-mail mentoring, online mentoring, telementoring,* and *virtual mentoring*) has become more common in recent years (Cravens, 2002; Miller & Griffiths, 2005). Given the well-documented shortage of adults who are both capable of serving as traditional face-to-face mentors and willing to do so, e-mentoring is likely to continue to grow in the foreseeable future (p.713).

Also, given the busier lives of adults and youth, e-mentoring allows for communication to happen outside of regular working hours. As mentioned in chapter two, e-mentoring offers many benefits over face-to-face mentoring: the comfort of being able to communicate from one's home is an asset, and the potential for anonymity is important for some youth to name a few of the benefits. Miller and Griffiths (2005), say, "Because the internet is not a face-to-face environment, it is perceived by many users to be anonymous and nonthreatening. It may therefore be more appealing to 'socially unskilled' individuals who may not have sought help if the self-help group was only offline and in person" (p.303). For youth who are uncomfortable sitting in the pastors' office, in a face-to-face encounter, it offers a more comfortable environment for communication to occur. E-mentoring offers another possibility for youth to connect with a mentor who can provide support when a crisis occurs, or to celebrate with them

when a joyous occasion arises. This is not to say that those who chose to use e-mentoring as a means of communicating with youth, cannot learn from the extensive research on face-to-face mentoring. Rhodes, Spenser, Saito and Sipe (2006) note,

Although formal mentoring has traditionally been thought of as one-to-one, face-to-face relationships between youth and unrelated adults, a growing number of programs have begun to experiment with online mentoring relationships. The increasing interest in this approach has been fueled by its relative convenience, coupled with the tremendous growth in online forms of communication. To date, online mentoring has tended to serve as an adjunct to face-to-face meetings but in some cases it is the primary means of connecting caring adults with youth (p.499).

Counselling programs have embraced e-mentoring as well as some educational agencies to assist with ongoing learning.

It is important to note, that there is very little research available on the benefits and pitfalls on using CMC as a means of providing care with youth, but the fact that CMC is being explored as an option will require that future research become important in the conversation of how to best mentor youth.

When using computer mediated communication for the purpose of mentoring, Miller and Griffiths (2005) suggest five points to keep in mind when evaluating the progress of e-mentoring (these points are also important when evaluating non computer mediated forms of mentoring). First, the two people involved in the mentoring program need to communicate the frequency of the contact. Both parties need to agree upon how frequently they will meet on line for the purpose of mentoring. This eliminates any potential for miscommunication of expectations. Second, mentoring relationships tend to

be more successful the longer they continue. Third, being open to wherever the conversation may go is very important. Often time's youth have more then one thing happening in their world and they need their mentor to be open to all the possibilities. The quality of the relationship, the emotional closeness and the high level of interaction are important. Youth want to know that they are being heard, and they want their mentors to be able to respond to their needs. Online communication can help with responding to the youth more quickly, without having to wait for office appointments. Fourth, mentors and youth need to structure their time together and stick to the plans that are made – this confirms that the relationship is important to both parties, which is important in building the mentoring relationship. And finally, it is important to make sure that support systems are in place, this includes the involvement of parents. With youth using home computers to communicate with their mentors, the role of parents becomes more significant – they can become more involved in the mentoring relationship as active participants rather then silent watchers (p.309).

E-mentoring is very new but offers exciting new possibilities for providing mentoring opportunities to youth. As such it will require many of the traditional upgrades to provide effective and beneficial mentoring to youth. On-going training of technology, structured activities for mentors and mentees, monitoring of the program and parental involvement all need continued education (Miller & Griffiths, 2005, p.305). Nevertheless, e-mentoring provides another, important medium for offering mentoring to youth, and as such, more research will need to be completed on its effectiveness and role in providing care to youth.

The next chapter describes an existing program currently being used in a congregation to provide pastoral care to youth using CMC, and it includes a personal perspective regarding how the program has been working and its use within the parish.

Chapter 5

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

For the last three years, I have been running a program at Mount Zion called MSN Ministry. This program consists of using a CMC tool (MSN Messenger) to provide pastoral care to the youth in the congregation ages 12-19. This program was something that I initiated following a comment made by a youth. This particular youth was unable to drive, was busy with school and an after school job and just did not have time to meet with me in the office at the church. Her other comment was that e-mail was too slow and that I should look into downloading MSN Messenger on my computer so that I could have a faster response to her questions and concerns.

So with her assistance, I downloaded MSN Messenger and began to learn about its many features and quirks, so that I was not tripping over the technology while at the same time trying to have a conversation with the youth. Learning about the technology was not the only hurdle I had to overcome. In the world of CMC, there is a whole new e-English that one must learn (a new form of short-hand that is important to being able to follow the conversation online). Once I had a good feel for the program, with the help of this one youth, I began to share my contact information with the rest of the youth in the congregation, and the ministry of providing care to the youth grew very quickly and continues to be an important means of communication with the youth as they have moved on to University, or for those who are just entering into the youth programs at Mount Zion.

The online conversations have varied in topics and questions, depending on the age of the youth, their gender, their hobbies, and the concerns one faces in adolescence.

Some topics that I frequently encounter are: dealing with peer pressure, disagreements with friends, homework help (more specifically questions they have about their religion classes), boyfriend/girlfriend concerns and some times youth just wanted to check in and say 'hi'. Other topics, less frequently discussed, consist of: pregnancy, suicide, and conflicts with parents. These topics, because of their intensity, had me reminding the youth that if I felt in some way they might endanger their lives, that I would contact parents to inform them of my concern and that we should get together for a face-to-face pastoral care visit.

This program, both as a personal and professional experience, has been profound. Many parents have commented on how much they appreciate the time I take with their children online, listening to them, providing them with information and just being another adult presence in their lives. The rewards for me, include giving me another opportunity to get to know the youth better, instead of just relying on seeing them on Sunday mornings, or during scheduled youth activities. The youth appreciate that I am available online – so that if they need something, they can just ask me the question, and not have to worry about their physical appearance, my visual response, or awkward body language. They appreciate that they can sit in the quiet of their room, at home, and feel the freedom to ask embarrassing, difficult, or information questions.

My church council was intrigued with this project I had taken on, not just because it gave their sons or daughters a safe place to ask questions, but for some of the parents, they too could use this means of communication to communicate with me about church business (council questions, worship concerns, committee reports). So, what started out as a means of providing pastoral care for youth in the congregation, also turned into a

very interesting form of communication for many members in the congregation, of all ages.

When I began my call at Mount Zion, with all the training I had had in Seminary, I assumed that most of the pastoral care I would be doing, would be with elderly people, who were unable to get out to worship (because of mobility issues). I also thought about pastoral care around weddings, funerals and any crisis that might occur. However, I can honestly say, that I had not given much thought to providing pastoral care to youth. Youth ministry has been important to me. I thought the primary role of working with youth was to provide them with opportunities for fellowship with other youth, teach them about the Lutheran faith through confirmation, Bible studies and spiritual retreats, and create a safe place for them to gather as community. However, I quickly realized that youth were looking for pastoral care, at an important time in their lives, and pastors can play an important role in the lives of the youth.

Often, the role of pastor is seen as someone who may be trusted, who may have wisdom, is caring and may be genuine; and who seeks to serve people in their faith and life's journey. These qualities overlap the qualities of being a mentor and providing youth with a safe place where they can get away from bullying – not only in the physical world but also in the world of technology. Parks (2000) claims, "there is much at stake in how they [young adults] are heard, understood, and met by the adult world in which they are seeking participation, purpose, meaning, and a faith to live by" (p. 3). I understand Parks to be saying that we, as pastors, can no longer expect to engage youth the way we think they are to be engaged, but rather to meet the youth where they are (in the world of computer-mediated communication) in order to understand them and help them to

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participate in making meaning of their lives in the world. Furthermore, meeting youth through the medium of technology, in order that questions about faith and how they relate to the secular world, is also very important. Parks (2000) claims,

> Faith is often linked exclusively to belief, particularly religious belief. But faith goes far beyond religious beliefs, parochially understood. Faith is more adequately recognized as *the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience.* Faith is a broad, generic human phenomenon. To be human is to dwell in faith, to dwell in the sense one makes out of life – what seems ultimately true and dependable about self, world, and cosmos (whether that meaning be strong or fragile, expressed in religious or secular terms). (p. 7).

Both the mentor and the mentee are seeking to make meaning in their lives, understanding that life may be enriched in sharing their experiences with one another and analyzing their participation in those experiences.

Young and old alike, are trying to make sense of life, the only difference is, that youth are trying to discover the tools they have or need, in order to help them make sense and meaning of life. Pastoral care in the church provides youth with a safe place to ask questions, to be heard, and to share common and uncommon experiences, without having to fear ridicule from their peers, or perhaps direct instruction from parents (instead of mutual conversation). "When the promise and vulnerability of the critical decade that we call young adulthood is either ignored or wrongly seen as only an amorphous, transitional time, the opportunity to cultivate, protect, and later harvest the fruits for the renewal of culture is lost" (Parks, 2000, p. 8). Ignoring youth and their questions will only hurt our

culture and experiences in the future. Providing pastoral care, not only with computer-mediated communication (which is the current trend) but also with face-to-face pastoral care is very important in the adolescent stage of life.

There is value in embracing CMC as a means of providing pastoral care to youth. Embracing CMC shows youth that we value their current context – their world is one where technology is growing and changing rapidly and if we take the time to understand the technology and meet youth in their comfort zone, I believe it demonstrates to youth how serious we are about being a part of their world and providing them with a safe place to make meaning of life. Using CMC eliminates some of the time constraints between the scheduling of appointments. Youth are busy in today's world, with school, work, extracurricular activities, and spending time with friends, and pastors are often busy in meetings at night and so the timing of a joint meeting with youth is often hard to accommodate. The use of CMC saves time as the two parties can set up a time to meet on line that is convenient for both people. This also facilitates communication, if for some reason, one of the parties is unable to drive to an appointment. Communicating between two computers means that people can communicate in comfortable settings, these youth can sit at home, in their bedroom, in their pyjamas, if they wish for the session – and they do not need to worry about their appearance or body language – they can feel comfortable and free to communicate without constraints.

While many people may not choose to use CMC as the only means to provide pastoral care to youth, it does provide options for providing pastoral care to youth. CMC is a form of communication that should not be ignored, as it opens up possibilities for

youth to engage their pastors in pastoral care, which will only help in making meaning out of life for all parties involved.

CMC as a means of Grace

Throughout the paper, CMC has been researched as a tool for providing pastoral care to youth in a high tech world, but what if CMC were not just a tool for providing pastoral care, but also as a means of living grace in the world. As mentioned throughout the paper, there are positive reasons for choosing to use CMC when communicating with youth, but from a theological perspective – what can CMC do for church workers and the people who gather in community.

Many people look for opportunities to connect with other people, to be in relationship and not isolation, whether that is through face-to-face communication, CMC, or through written correspondence. People want to know that they are valued, appreciated, thought of, and loved. Grace, is God's gift to humanity, which reminds us that we are loved unconditionally, without stipulations and without fear that that love will one day be taken away if we are unable to live up to a prescribed set of rules. God places no rules, guidelines, or hidden meanings, in the promise of grace. God's gift of grace promises a life of unconditional love. That unconditional love is most clearly expressed in the death and resurrection of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, so that all of humanity would know just how much God loves us. A God who is willing to sacrifice his own Son, so that the entire world would know the promise of eternal life -- that is unconditional love.

This same model is what churches and congregations aspire to live out in their daily living; to be the tangible presence of God's unconditional love for one another. In terms of CMC, the goal of using this technology is to provide a safe place for youth to come and encounter God's love through human relationships, through connection with another human being, who genuinely cares about the life of the youth and their questions and concerns. Having said that, the world is not perfect and so grace is not always the message that is conveyed to youth. In terms of CMC, in the chapter on cyber bullying, some may view CMC not as a means of providing and living grace for youth, but rather as an opportunity for sin to overcast the benefits of using CMC, where torture and cruelty are the dominant message, rather then love and care. It is very important, should a pastor decide to use CMC to provide pastoral care to youth, that they diligently strive to be a place where grace is the dominant message over sin. That even though life can be hard, and situations unfair – God's love is unfailing, unending and unconditional for humanity.

CMC a new Ecclesiology?

There has been a growing trend in churches to conform to the changes in society around technology. Congregations are being encouraged to upgrade technology (not only for learning opportunities and office administration but also in worship with digital projectors and overhead screens), to provide Sunday morning entertainment (in order to better convey a solid theology) and in order to entice 'people' through the church doors (people meaning more specifically the younger generations). "Does CMC mean a new ecclesiology for church?" "Does it mean that the way we do church needs to change?"

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"Does culture need to be the only thing that influences church life and ministry?" Not at all.

I think there are several ways of using CMC in the life of the church. The first would be to throw away the old way of doing things (tradition), and implementing the new way of doing things (technology and keeping up with the changes in culture). I think this first model would be crippling in a congregation. Throwing out the old for the new is never the answer. It becomes a quick fix to a bigger and more complex question – "what is the role of church in today's society and vice versa?"

A second way to explore CMC in a congregation would be to ignore the reality that technology is advancing quickly in society and that it will and does influence the life of the church. To pretend as though it does not exist, will have the opposite effect to the first scenario. People want to know how God's message of unconditional love fits into the rest of the work week. Church is not just about what happens on Sunday morning; rather church is how we, as Christians, live the rest of the week. People are not looking for some archaic form of theology, they are looking for how theology engages current social and cultural context.

The final way of exploring CMC in a congregation would be to find a way to balance the advancing technology against the current models of ministry in the congregation. I believe that CMC has its place in the congregation for providing pastoral care, communication opportunities and enhancing Sunday morning worship experiences, but it has to be in balance with the current practices being used in the congregation. So for example, I would never say get rid of written correspondence and telephones as a means of communication and use only computers – this would be a ridiculous suggestion.

However, a blend of all the technologies can be used to communicate with the congregation. Technology can be used in worship, not as the only means for communication but as an enhancement to the worship experience. And finally, technology and CMC can also be carried over into providing pastoral care to the congregation, not as the only means of receiving care, but by having it as an option. CMC opens up more possibilities for people to be in contact with the pastor for pastoral care. CMC should not be seen as a new ecclesiology, but rather as an enhancement to the current model for doing ministry.

CONCLUSION

This study included (1) what computer-mediated communication is, (2) the differences between Asynchronous and Synchronous forms of CMC, (3) the benefits and limitations in using CMC, and the privacy, ethical and legal issues when using CMC as a means of providing pastoral care to youth. After giving some background on what CMC is and the benefits and limitations, the focus then shifted to current concerns of using CMC for providing pastoral care to youth.

Previous studies indicated a concern of CMC to be internet bullying. While there are many positive outcomes to using CMC, youth experience a concern for internet bullying (bullying from the playgrounds during school hours, to the potential of 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, of bullying which can occur on the internet). In this chapter, focus was given to defining bullying, and the differences between traditional bullying and internet bullying, the psychological and social implications of internet bullying on our youth, the appeal of cyber bullying and who is prone to using the internet as a resource for bullying other people, and whether or not cyber bullying can be prevented.

After examining the worst outcome of CMC, it was important to balance that with some of the benefits of CMC. The fourth chapter addressed ways in which CMC may be used to provide mentoring to youth, and how mentoring during the stage of adolescences is very important for development. In this chapter, definitions of mentoring were discussed along with its value. Moreover, in this chapter, precedence was given to the role of mentoring and its impact on youth and even more specifically, since the thesis states the importance of pastoral care for youth, this chapter focused on the importance of

mentoring from a Christian perspective. Finally, this chapter focused on mentoring through the medium of CMC.

In the final chapter of the thesis, a more personal look was taken in using CMC to provide pastoral care to youth. I discussed how CMC is being used in my current parish to communicate with youth and provide a place for youth to express and discern their place in life and the ask questions they might have and seek the support they need in the stage of adolescences.

Future Research

While this paper used a hermeneutical approach for assessing the research available on using CMC as a means for providing pastoral care to youth, there are many other methods of research one might use in the future for obtaining more information on the thesis topic.

Future research might include several things, when assessing the benefits of using CMC as a means for providing pastoral care to youth in the congregation. For example, this paper was a hermeneutical approach to understanding the topic. In many ways, the research is actually behind the practice of using CMC in congregations to provide pastoral care, and that needs to change – as the more statistics on this topic, will help us to better understand its role in ministry. Rochlen, Zack & Speyer (2004) say, "Perhaps the most obvious explanation for this shortage of research is due to the newness of the practice, particularly when contrasted with face-to-face psychotherapy" (p.275). Mallen, Vogel, Rochlen & Day (2005) say, "However, in the counselling world, reports are mostly positive, indicating client improvement, which may be an important note to keep

in mind when assessing CMC in the context of ministry and pastoral care (p.842). In the future, I would like to continue the research by doing phenomenological research or quantitative research regarding the profile of people who are using CMC in congregations to provide pastoral care to youth.

A second area of focus would be on the ethical implications of working with youth. A Toronto-based organization notes that a youth at the age of 12, in Ontario, can consent to counselling on their own without having to seek the permission of a parent (Professionally Speaking, December 2000, Legal Milestones). A question worth exploring would be whether this would be helpful in providing pastoral care through CMC, or would it be a limitation not to have the parents' involvement.

Engaging congregations, who are currently using forms of CMC to provide care to youth in the congregation, will be of utmost importance. Having them participate in surveys and interviews, which ask pertinent questions around their CMC ministries will be very important. The following, are some questions that might be helpful when conducting research:

1. What has been your experience of interaction with your pastor/youth using CMC (MSN Messenger, E-mail, Facebook, etc.)?
    a. What has been good/helpful about this medium for communication?
    b. What was not good/helpful about this medium for communication?
2. Was there anything difficult about meeting online?
3. What did you like about the online opportunities for conversations?
4. What made you decide to participate in CMC ministry?
5. What concerns, if any, do you have about receiving/providing pastoral care through CMC?
6. What topics would you feel comfortable discussing over CMC?
7. What topics would you not feel comfortable discussing over CMC?
8. Does the absence of verbal and non-verbal clues make a difference in the communication?

This type of research might be useful if one were to look at doing doctoral work or a more in depth look at the how people are responding to using CMC to provide pastoral care to youth. With little empirical research out there on how CMC is being used and how people are responding to its use, it would be prudent to obtain more statistical research to facilitate ongoing conversation regarding the use of CMC to provide pastoral care to youth in a high tech world.
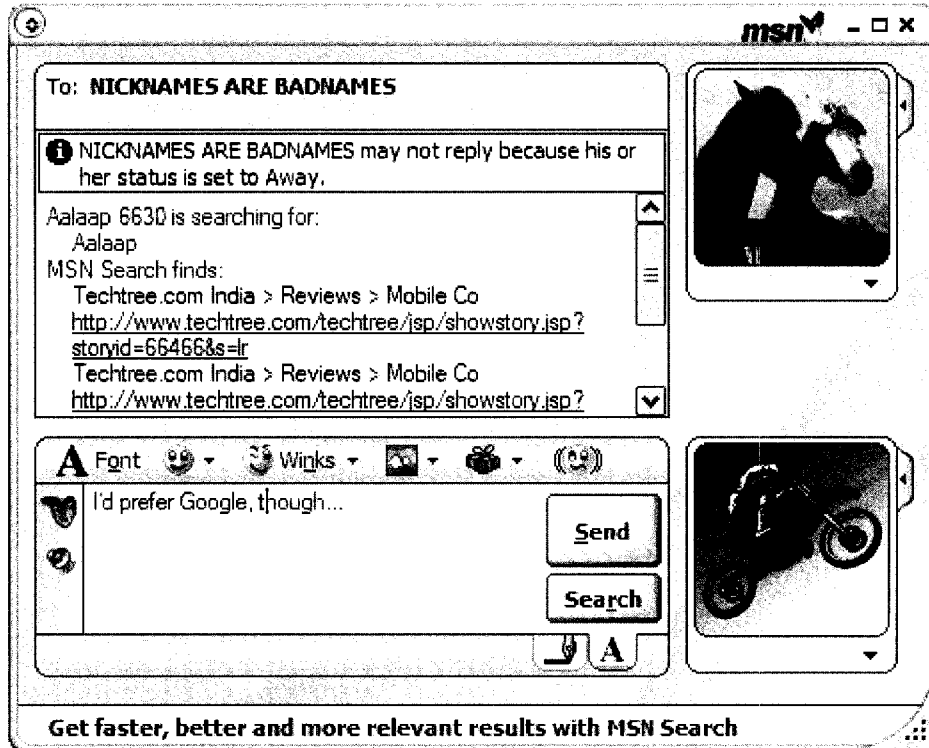
Appendix A

Asynchronous Chat Communication – Facebook Template[7]

[7] http://www.nevblog.com/images/facebook-screenshot-small.jpg viewed September 10, 2007.

Appendix B

Synchronous Chat Communication: MSN Messenger Template[8]

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[8] http://images.techtree.com/ttimages/story/rw_msn_messenger_7_final_sharedsearch.gif viewed
September 10, 2007.

Appendix C

Emoticons

Emoticons are emotional graphics--visual ways to express the way you feel when words alone just aren't enough[9].

To send this: **Type this:**

To send this:	Type this:	To send this:	Type this:
Smile	:-) or :)	Open-mouthed	:-D or :d
Surprised	:-O or :o	Tongue out	:-P or :p
Wink	;-) or ;)	Sad	:-(or :(
Confused	:-S or :s	Disappointed	:-| or :|
Crying	:'(	Embarrassed	:-$ or :$
Hot	(H) or (h)	Angry	:-@ or :@
Angel	(A) or (a)	Devil	(6)
Don't tell anyone	:-#	Baring teeth	8o|
Nerd	8-|	Sarcastic	^o)
Secret telling	:-*	Sick	+o(
I don't know	:^)	Thinking	*-)
Party	<:o)	Eye-rolling	8-)
Sleepy	|-)	Coffee cup	(C) or (c)
Thumbs up	(Y) or (y)	Thumbs down	(N) or (n)
Beer mug	(B) or (b)	Martini glass	(D) or (d)
Girl	(X) or (x)	Boy	(Z) or (z)
Left hug	({)	Right hug	(})
Vampire bat	:-[or :[	Birthday cake	(^)
Red heart	(L) or (l)	Broken heart	(U) or (u)
Red lips	(K) or (k)	Gift with a bow	(G) or (g)
Red rose	(F) or (f)	Wilted rose	(W) or (w)
Camera	(P) or (p)	Filmstrip	(~)
Cat face	(@)	Dog face	(&)
Telephone receiver	(T) or (t)	Light bulb	(I) or (i)
Note	(8)	Sleeping half-moon	(S)

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[9] http://messenger.msn.com/Resource/Emoticons.aspx , viewed August 22, 2007.

Star	**(*)**		E-mail	**(E)** or **(e)**
Clock	**(O)** or **(o)**		MSN Messenger icon	**(M)** or **(m)**
Snail	**(sn)**		Black Sheep	**(bah)**
Plate	**(pl)**		Bowl	**(ı ı)**
Pizza	**(pi)**		Soccer ball	**(so)**
Auto	**(au)**		Airplane	**(ap)**
Umbrella	**(um)**		Island with a palm tree	**(ip)**
Computer	**(co)**		Mobile Phone	**(mp)**
Stormy cloud	**(st)**		Lightning	**(li)**
Money	**(mo)**			

Appendix D

Matthew 28:18-20

[18]And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19]Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'*

Ephesians 4:11-16

[11]The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, [12]to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13]until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. [14]We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. [15]But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16]from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

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