

Online COMMUNITY

By Nate Beard

Is it true that you can only experience community in person, or can “community” be accomplished online? People express great thoughts and arguments for both sides. I believe the best way to get to know someone is in person, but we shouldn’t discount real conversations that can happen online where people feel free to open up and share things that wouldn’t be discussed while sitting in a room.

A few months ago, there was a gathering at the Polk County Courthouse in Des Moines, Iowa, in opposition to same-sex marriage. The Iowa Supreme Court had legalized same-sex marriage last year without a vote from the people of Iowa who overwhelmingly oppose it. I was really surprised when Iowa Governor Chet Culver exited the

Gallery after his speech to close to 450-600 people chanting, “Let us Vote!” So, documenting the situation, I sent out a tweet (which also updates my Facebook status) about it. That one update spawned a Facebook-comment-conversation/argument that was over 70 comments long.

The conversation was between some Christian friends who oppose same-sex marriage, an atheist friend, and a homosexual friend who’s hoping the law will stand. For the most part, my Christian friends behaved themselves; however, with the obvious difference in opinions, things got a little heated at times.

The reality is that conversation probably wouldn’t have taken place if we were all sitting in a room together. Even if it had begun, it probably wouldn’t have lasted as long and some of the parties involved would have left before it was over. The great thing is that people who didn’t actually enter the conversation, read along with it. One such friend said, “I loved what happened on your profile yesterday. It was cool to be able to see a place where questions were asked and points of view shared,

and, while some were intense, it was overall more informing than attacking.”

Not only can online community be great for conversation, it can be great for networking. I’ve been able to get to know some really great people in the Des Moines area because of Twitter – other church tech guys and even authors that I admire. So as much as you might not think online community is a valued form of developing a community or establishing relationships, it is part of our world now. You can ignore it, or you can leverage it.

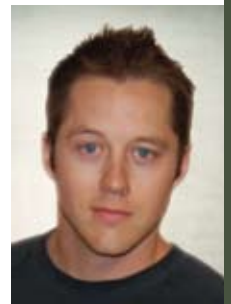
For over 30 years Jim Beard, my dad, has been involved in ministry – as a church planter, associate pastor, senior pastor, district leader, and now regional leader. In addition to serving as the

Executive Director for the Southeast Region of Open Bible Churches, he’s getting his doctorate degree in organizational leadership. He advises pastors across several denominations for church revitalization and is nearly finished writing a book.

In case that isn’t enough, he recently started a blog, continuing in his dynamic scheme to be Kingdom-minded – to

disciple people via the Web. I helped him set up his blog, answered a few questions, and he took off with it. In only few days, he had over 500 “hits.” I have to say, I’m really very proud of him!

We’ve both made this promise: We will not use our blogs to write about the Church’s mistakes. Honestly, I wish more Christian writers would take this vow. Let’s remember, after all, the Church is Christ’s true love. We can learn from our mistakes without dwelling on them. Instead, we’ll promote good ideas, share inspiration, and hopefully share some resources that help you and/or your church advance the Great Commission.



Nate Beard is the Creative Media Director at Cornerstone Family Church in Des Moines, Iowa. To view Nate’s Web site and find links to church resources for Web site creation and maintenance, sermon illustrations, cyber marketing, and much more, go to www.natebeard.com. To view Jim Beard’s blog, visit www.jimbeard.com

