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About Vintage Voice

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VINTAGE VOICE



Gadgets and Technology

By the Rev. Robert Warren Cromey

The fastest growing group of users of technology is older women, the second fastest is older men. Several of my clergy friends, well into their eighties, regularly use the internet, Facebook, and texting. In my seminary class of 1956, 18 alumni say they have email addresses. There were 50 men (only men) in our class. I hear from five from time to time. I'd love to hear from more.

I have enjoyed my Apple computers since the early 1980s when I was given an old one by a friend. I took one class and was on my own, teaching myself along the way. I thought I could never give up writing my sermons with anything but a yellow legal pad and a felt-tip pen. But I was a complete instant convert. The switch was seamless and even improved my sermons because I could see the words right in front of me and could make instant corrections.

In general, I am not a handy person. Building bookshelves, fine cabinet-making, or even making model airplanes baffled me. Even my typewriter scared me. I could change a light bulb, plug in a lamp, and change a fuse. That was the extent of my mechanical abilities. However, the basics of using a computer came quickly. I have no interest in how it works behind the screen.

At first, writing out my sermons and writing whole letters, printing them out with perfect spelling and grammar was a great accomplishment. I handled all my correspondence. I did not need a secretary for that.

By the late 1980s, email began to become popular. When I retired in 2002, the volume had grown a great deal. Today, clergy tell me they are almost overwhelmed by emails from vestry members, altar guilds, flower guilds, acolytes, the deanery, the diocese, and the national church.

Now there are ways of controlling incoming emails and responses. Texting with short clipped messages has helped. When I questioned my daughter about texting, she said, "Dad, wouldn't it be nice to text a message to your granddaughter, for example, a word of encouragement when she is about to take an important test?" That

did it. I was hooked. With my iPhone, I can text family and friends in just a few words. I'd better keep it short, since my grandchildren seldom read emails and may or may not respond to a text message.

Some have criticized these technological gadgets as making human contacts trivial and impersonal. I find just the opposite. I am in touch with many more people, more regularly than when I depended on the telephone and letters. People from my glorious past have found me online and have resumed long-forgotten relationships. Now they have even deeper meaning. The woman who was maid of honor at the wedding of my late first wife and me found me online and we have had regular correspondence since. I hadn't heard from her in 50 years.

Facebook is a wonderful way to share our selves, photos, and ideas with others. Pictures of my daughters and grandchildren can be posted regularly for others to appreciate and admire. Posted news of travels lets us tell about our trips and learn from the travel experiences of others. Sometimes I read whole sermons posted on Facebook.

When I get a photo from a seminary classmate, his spouse, or a family member, it reminds me to say a brief "arrow" prayer of thanksgiving to God for those persons. Without the picture, I would not have a reminder to pray for them.

Older people may rely on taxis and hired cars to get around. We who live in large cities now find that our cell phones can summon these vehicles to come right to our door. We can even pay by credit card. More doctors and healthcare workers are available by email, saving us long telephone waits and even trips to offices.

As we age, researching online can help us learn about diseases and treatment and also help find the best medical help available. Or we can do research into interesting fields of study. The lectionary is available online. Biblical study, online prayer groups, and counseling services are available on the internet.

I still refer to my computer as my "machine" and my cell phone as a "gadget." However, I am grateful to these technologies, which so enhance my life as a retired person. They provide entertainment — yes, I watch DVDs on my computer — but even more important, they provide ways of connecting to friends, family, and the world beyond my home.

We who are clergy are pastors and communicators even in retirement. Few of us want to stop connecting to people. Personal contact is a strengthening comfort to others and to ourselves. The Gospel call to "feed my sheep" — though it might sound a bit patronizing now — is still true for most of us. Modern technology — our "gadgets" — offers another way we can feed ourselves and others and continue to participate in our ministry as followers of Jesus, no matter our age.

