The Future Church:
Identity and Persuasion on Congregational Websites

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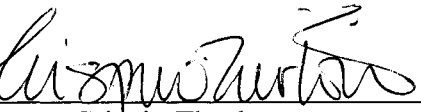

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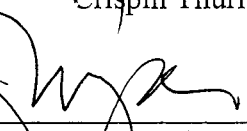

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Abstract

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Because of demographic shifts in church attendance over recent decades, rising secularism, and the influence of other world religions, religious leaders are engaging more frequently in discussions about future directions for Christianity in the United States. Three kinds of Protestant Christian congregations in the United States were chosen because they seem likely to represent future directions for the church: evangelical megachurches, because each year a higher percentage of church attenders in the United States attend megachurches; vibrant liberal/mainline congregations, because of the growing focus on progressive Christian voices in politics; and emergent churches, because of their young demographic and surprising influence in spite of their small size. The websites of these three kinds of churches were studied, because websites are a place for self-presentation at the initiative of the congregations and because websites are a communication strategy that seems likely to influence future directions for congregations. The websites were examined to discover the ways the congregations presented their identities and exercised persuasion. Three kinds of analysis are presented. Content analysis was used to examine 60 websites, 20 in each of the three categories, to provide a descriptive analysis. Secondly, an interpretive analysis presents the results of a rhetorical study of the websites of two congregations in each of the three categories that were chosen as exemplars of their movements. Third, 10 website producers were interviewed and all the data was reviewed using critical analysis influenced by social semiotics. Findings include differences in website components and strategy. The megachurch websites excelled in providing opportunities for engagement in small groups, service

opportunities, and classes sponsored by the congregation. The vibrant liberal/mainline websites presented a strong ethos of inclusive welcome and commitment to justice based on the values of Jesus. The emergent church websites stressed community and the arts, grounded in theological reflection in a way that was unique to them. Many of the website producers expressed their enthusiasm for the use of the secular advertising medium for promoting the Christian faith in congregations, and many indicated they work independently from the pastoral staff and lay leaders of the congregation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The leaders of several advocacy groups made invaluable suggestions about specific congregations to study, and I am grateful to them as well: Pam Byers, Covenant Network, Presbyterian Church (USA); Rev. Kenneth L. Pennings, Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, American Baptist Church; Rev. Troy Plummer, Reconciling Ministries Network, United Methodist Church; Jerry Vaghts, Lutherans Concerned/North America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Rev. Ruth Garwood, Coalition for LGBT Concerns, United Church of Christ; and Rev. Jay Johnson, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry. All of them gave me many names of mainline congregations they considered to be liberal and "vibrant," and I selected a smaller number from their lists to study. Tony Jones, a leader of the emergent church "conversation," and Scott Thumma, at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, also gave me guidance regarding the selection of congregations to study.

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Chapter One
American Protestant Congregations and their Future

Protestant Christianity has had a prominent place in public life in the United States since the founding of the first colonies. Massachusetts was founded as a theocracy, dominated by the Puritans; Virginia functioned like England, with an Anglican state church; and in Pennsylvania, where a variety of Protestant Christian denominations were permitted to flourish, the Quakers dominated the government of the colony (Lambert, 2003). By the time of the writing of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, separation of church and state had come into some fashion as a way to construct government, but the founders believed that Protestant Christianity was the best way to teach moral behavior, so the education system continued to draw heavily on Protestant values (Lambert; Ahlstrom, 1975; Noll, 2001). During the 1800s, this religious outlook strongly influenced daily life: the Bible was taught in public schools, presidents called for days of prayer and fasting during times of crisis, and both sides during the Civil War claimed their positions followed from Christian values (Ahlstrom; Marsden, 1991). During the twentieth century, immigrants brought other religions to the United States, pluralism and secularism gained strength in part because of urbanization, and the influence of Protestant Christianity began to wane to some extent (Marsden). At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, Protestants again began to find a voice and reclaimed some of the influence they had exercised throughout U.S. history, but in new forms (Noll, Carpenter, 1997; Kellstedt and Green, 2003; Hunter, 1987).

Protestant Christianity in the United States is distinct in several ways when compared with the rest of the world. The cultural influence of Protestant Christianity, coupled with U. S. government deregulation (Finke and Stark, 2005), has resulted in a society that participates in religious congregations at a significantly higher rate than in other industrialized countries, with the majority of those congregations and participants

being Protestant (Chaves, 2004). The deep divisions between conservative and liberal Protestants in the United States are also unusual when compared with the rest of the world (Freston, 2001; Williams, 1997). Wuthnow (1988) argues that in the decades since World War II, American religion has undergone a significant restructuring, so that now the greatest division – conservatives versus liberals – cuts across denominational groupings. Some scholars (such as Kniss, 1997) argue for other ways of describing the issues that divide Protestant Christians in the United States; others (such as Noll, 2001) note that Protestantism in the United States is complex and varied and that even labels such as "evangelical" obscure the diversity within conservative Christianity.

Despite these differences in describing the diversity in conservative and liberal strands within American Protestantism, most scholars agree that church attendance over the past few decades has shifted. Since the 1960s, mainline churches have declined in membership and attendance, while conservative churches are growing in numbers and influence (Noll; Finke and Stark; Ostling, 2000; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1994; Hunter, 1987). These shifts in church attendance patterns have precipitated an extensive literature about the future of the American church. A 1991 book, *The Once and Future Church* (Mead), spawned a series of books that address the future of the American church. Additional titles from other publishers reveal a growing concern among congregational leaders about the relevance of the church in changing times and the implications of the shift in church attendance patterns; such titles include *Future Church: Ministry in a Post-seeker Age* (Wilson, 2004), *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (McNeal, 2003), *Changing Church: How God is Leading His Church into the Future* (Wagner, 2004), and *The Postmodern Parish: New Ministry for a New Era* (Kitchens, 2003). These and other books, published by major religious presses, have been accompanied by numerous magazine articles and seminars for ministers focused on similar topics. They demonstrate the increasing interest in the future of the church on the part of religious leaders. This study grew out of that concern.

This study is also grounded in my own experience as an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). I served two congregations in the Seattle area in pastoral roles. In one of those congregations, I oversaw all the congregational communications and spent many hours in conversation and contemplation of questions of congregational identity: Who are we as a congregation and how can we best represent that reality in our publications? How can we as a congregation best serve in this rapidly changing world? How can we position ourselves to be a church for the future? As a student and budding scholar in the field of communication studies, these questions intensified. This study brings together the growing interest on my part and on the part of other religious leaders in the future of the Christian church in the United States, the central role played by individual congregations in that future, and the ways congregations communicate who they are and what they do. This study focuses on three groups of churches chosen because they represent possible future directions for Protestant Christianity in the United States: megachurches, vibrant liberal/mainline churches, and emergent churches. These three groups do not by any means represent the diversity within American Protestant Christianity, much less the complexity of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, but they do capture some of the life and energy among Protestants today that seems to indicate trends for the future.

The Churches in this Study

I turn now to a discussion of the three kinds of churches chosen for this study. Megachurches are generally defined as churches with a sustained average worship attendance of more than 2,000, which equates to less than 1% of the nation's churches. According to one researcher, using data that is several years old, the nearly 300 megachurches that have been identified in the United States are home to almost 20 percent of total churchgoers (Chaves, 2004).[1] According to another group of scholars,

[1] Nothing magical happens when a congregation's membership passes 2,000. A congregation of 1900 members and another congregation of 2100 might be very similar in philosophy and priorities. However, the body of congregations identified as megachurches make a practical object of analysis. The vast majority of them are theologically conservative; only a handful of liberal/mainline churches reach a membership of 2,000. In addition, the large size and commensurately large budgets of these

the number of megachurches in the United States and Canada in 2005 was more than 1200 and increasing rapidly (Thumma, Travis, & Bird, 2005). Megachurches offer a dazzling array of programs to meet churchgoers' needs and wants (Hart, 2004; Wilson, 2000). They are usually evangelical in their theology,[2] affirming the authority and inspiration of the Bible[3] and the need for personal faith in Christ in order to be saved from sin (Henry, 1974).[4] Evangelical churches are considered to represent the conservative end of the theological spectrum of Protestant Christian churches, a distinction that originated in the early twentieth century when some other churches, which came to be called "liberal and modernist" became increasingly concerned with effecting social change rather than evangelism (Marsden, 1991).[5] Megachurches have recently attracted the attention of news media because of their remarkable growth over recent decades (Mahler, 2005), as well as the fact that their pastors are gaining a national voice, both in politics and in the culture at large. For example, some megachurch pastors seem to have played an active role in the politics of the 2004 presidential election (Sharlet, 2005). Another example is *The Purpose Driven Life*, one

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congregations result in complex and varied websites with abundant ways of presenting organizational identity and exercising persuasion.

[2] Thumma (2001) found that 92% of people who attend megachurches state the Bible is absolutely foundational as a source of authority. Thumma, Travis, & Bird (2005) asked megachurch leaders "What is the closest description of the theological identity of the majority of your church's participating adults?" and received these answers: Evangelical 56%, Charismatic 8%, Pentecostal 8%, Moderate 7%, Traditional 5%, Seeker 7%, Fundamentalist 2%, Other 7%.

[3] Marsden (1991) notes a range of views within evangelicalism about the exact nature of the "authority and inspiration" of the Bible. Opinions range from inerrancy, which asserts that the Bible is "absolutely errorless" (p. 37), to a view that insists on the authority of the Bible as a necessary guide to the life of faith, without viewing it as errorless.

[4] Noll (2001) cites four questions that have been used in research to identify "evangelical conviction": crucicentrism ("through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of my sins"), biblicism ("the Bible is the inspired word of God" or "the Bible is God's word, and is to be taken literally, word for word"), conversionism ("I have committed my life to Christ and consider myself to be a converted Christian"), and activism ("it is important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians") (p. 31).

[5] This brief summary of evangelicalism does not attempt to do justice to many of the complexities of the movement. For example, significant twentieth century movements within evangelicalism include as dispensationalism, the holiness movement, Pentecostalism, and the African American evangelical experience. Marsden (1991) describes evangelicalism as a "kaleidoscope," with such diverse elements as Mennonite peace churches, black Pentecostals, Episcopal charismatics, Nazarenes and Southern Baptists. He notes, "It is a grouping for which no one party could presume to speak," and it has unity "only in the broadest sense" (p. 65).

of the best-selling books of all time, which was written by Rick Warren, the pastor of one of the most influential megachurches, Saddleback Community Church (Wilson, 2000; Yancey, 2005; the Church Report, 2005; Christianity Today, 2004).

A second group of churches that have received attention in recent years are vibrant liberal mainline churches. The term "liberal" refers to their historic alignment with progressive ideals promoting social justice (Marsden, 1991), and the term "mainline" refers to their identification with mainline denominations.[6] Research indicates that Protestant congregations which have grown and thrived in recent decades are largely conservative (Iannaccone, 1994; Tamney, Johnson, McElmurry, & Saunders, 2003; Olson, 2001, Finke and Stark, 2005), and only a small percentage of liberal/mainline Protestant churches have broken this pattern. According to Wellman (2002), these vibrant liberal churches have a demanding theological and moral vision that integrates thought and action, remains in dialogue with other religious perspectives, nurtures spiritual disciplines, and advocates an egalitarian moral perspective. Diana Butler Bass (2004, 2005, 2006), who directed a research study on what she calls vital mainline congregations,[7] writes that these congregations have found new vitality "through an intentional engagement with Christian tradition as embodied in faith practices such as discernment, hospitality, testimony, contemplation, and justice," and that these congregations are "not message-centered so much as mystery-centered communities" (2005, p. 14). In the light of growing political debate about the role of religion in public life, these congregations are noteworthy because of their advocacy for disenfranchised groups for whom the government has reduced funding in recent years and their insistence that care for the poor, not military might or free enterprise, is the first responsibility of a "Christian" nation. These churches are

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[6] Mainline Protestantism is defined by the Pew Forum as "the left, center and liberal wings of the Episcopal Church, USA; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church, and smaller denominations with similar beliefs." (www.religioustolerance.org, 2006) See also Hamilton and McKinney (2003).

[7] The three-year study that Bass directed is The Project on Congregations of Intentional Practice, funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc., and located at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, VA, the largest seminary of the Episcopal Church in America. Bass studied mainline congregations that consider themselves to be moderate or liberal.

entering – or perhaps more accurately, re-entering – into the public sphere because of the emergence and growth of a progressive religious voice in politics (Wallis, 2005; Dart, 2006).

Emergent churches are evangelical in theology like megachurches, but usually much smaller. Emergent church leaders seek to minister in a culture that has experienced two major shifts in recent years, the shift from modernism to postmodernism and the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005). Emergent churches are populated largely by younger Christians who reject the "big box" megachurches with their fast-paced programs and black-and-white answers (Carson, 2005) and who do not find meaning in many traditional worship styles which are linear, word based and abstract. Emergent church leaders suggest that they "may look back to what they are emerging *from* more than they look forward to what they are emerging *into*" (Gibbs and Bolger, p. 28, italics in original). Emergent churches have been described as image-based – that is, visual images play a significant part in their worship and congregational life – with an emphasis on the significance and centrality of Christian community. They consciously draw on ancient Christian tradition in the areas of spiritual disciplines and in their understanding of Christian community. In addition, they have a penchant for embracing mystery, beauty, ritual, high technology, environmentalism, and the arts. Common in worship are dramas and incense, as well as participatory elements such as prayer stations and communion tables. Emergent churches have gained recent media attention, both in the religious and secular press, because they represent a rapidly growing form of evangelicalism which, with their young demographic and conscious engagement with contemporary culture, may represent the future – or a future – of the church (Bader-Saye, 2004; Crouch, 2004; Norman, 2005; Asay, 2005; Orozco, 2005; Lindsay, 2003, Yancey, 2005). Seminary professor D. A. Carson writes that the "emerging" or "emergent church" movement, "though scarcely a dozen years old, exerts an astonishingly broad influence" (p. 9). This influence, Carson notes, can be seen a wealth of literature and the number of conferences focused on the emergent movement.

In summary, each of the three kinds of congregations holds a distinct place in Protestant Christian congregational life and each is connected to contemporary American culture in a different way. These three kinds of congregations are found all over the United States in urban, suburban and small town settings. They span the range of congregational size, with megachurches at the large end of the spectrum and emergent and mainline churches spread mostly across the small and mid-sized range. They also span the range of the theological spectrum historically found in Protestant churches, with megachurches and emergent churches on the more conservative side and the liberal mainline churches on the liberal side. In addition, these three kinds of congregations represent possible future directions for Protestant Christianity in the United States: megachurches because they have proliferated so rapidly in recent years and because a growing percentage of churchgoers attend megachurches, vibrant liberal churches because of the recent rise of progressive religious voices in politics, and emergent churches because of their young demographic and because they seek to express the Christian faith in forms appropriate for the post-Christendom, postmodern culture. A careful examination of these three kinds of churches gives insights into the patterns of congregational life that are relevant for discussion about the future of American Protestant Christianity.

A research approach grounded in communication scholarship is valuable for examining aspects of the philosophies and priorities of these churches. Since its beginning, the Christian church has embraced the significance of communication. The Gospel of John refers to Jesus as "the Word" (John 1:1); elsewhere in the New Testament God is said to have "spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:2); and the Apostle Paul, in his letters, refers seven times to his call to "proclaim the gospel" (e.g., Romans 1:15). Early Christians understood the narrative texts and letters of the New Testament to be one form of the proclamation of the gospel, while preaching was another (Wallace, 1974). As early as the fourth century, Augustine (1958) began to apply principles of classical rhetoric to the analysis of biblical texts and preaching, with the goal of encouraging Christians to use effective communication methods in their

proclamation, and indeed the late medieval period saw a flowering of the analysis and teaching of preaching using such principles (Murphy, 1974). Christians in the United States have frequently embraced the newest and most effective means of communication for the sake of proclaiming the gospel, from circuit-riding preachers in the seventeenth century to Christian book and pamphlet publishers in the eighteenth century (Ahlstrom, 1975; Finke and Iannaccone, 1993). More recently, twentieth-century American Christians established hundreds of magazines, publishing houses, radio stations and television programs (Carpenter, 1997; Finke and Stark, 2005; Noll, 2001; Smith, 1998). And today, use of the World Wide Web ("web" from here on) might be viewed as the latest step in the savvy communication practices of American Christians (Larsen, 2001; Larsen, 2004).

This dissertation focuses on the web practices of Protestant congregations to understand their role in contemporary Christian ministry and to try to discern patterns that will influence the future of Protestant Christianity in the United States. Websites are integrally connected to the future of the church because so many aspects of congregational life are now represented on websites, which are becoming a primary means of promotion for congregations as well as a place for connection for members and attenders. Many new forms of communication and engagement are possible through congregational websites: online donations and signups for events, discussion forums for the whole congregations or for subgroups within the congregation, audio and video presentations of sermons or entire worship services, and targeted recruitment for events and service opportunites. All of these new opportunities are shaping the church for the future and are worthy of study. The kinds of congregations studied here represent three possible future directions for the church. Many of the findings of this study provide information about trends and patterns of ministry in these kinds of congregations. These findings can inform discussions of strategy and philosophy for individual congregations and their leaders, as well as denominational leaders, as they seek to guide the Christian church into the future and as they seek to meet the needs of people living in a postmodern consumer culture.

Chapter Two

Conceptual Framework: Organizations, Rhetoric of the Web, and Social Semiotics

Two key aspects of Christian congregational life are identity and persuasion. For the former, "Who are we and why does it matter?" are central questions for all organizations, including congregations. In the area of persuasion, Christian congregations have the additional biblical mandate to "preach the gospel" with the goal of persuading others of the significance of the Christian faith. Therefore the conceptual framework for this study draws on theory and research related to identity and persuasion. The object of analysis is congregational websites. Each of the three kinds of congregations discussed above – megachurches, emergent churches, and vibrant liberal churches – has a distinct theological and philosophical outlook that shapes their use of the web to reach into their communities and to keep their members informed, motivated, and connected. Comparing and contrasting the public voices of these types of churches, in particular their self-presentation on the web, provides important insights into Protestant Christian life in the United States in the first decade of the twenty-first century. With this in mind, several areas of scholarship serve as foundational concepts. First, social science research on organizational identity and community, both off and on the web, was examined to discern principles that can be applied to the study of representations of congregational identity. Rhetorical theory as applied to the web is the second foundational framing concept because of the long-standing focus on persuasion in rhetorical studies. Third, theories of semiotics and social semiotics were considered, because signs and symbols are used by individuals and communities both to present identity and exercise persuasion. Websites of congregations in the three groups of churches were examined using principles derived from these three areas of study, with the expectation of finding differences in the symbolic representation of organizational identity as well as in methods of persuasion.

Organizational Identity and Community

Organizational identity has been studied by marketers for several decades, but U.S. social scientists began to study the concept only a little more than twenty years ago. In the past decade, the amount of research on organizational identity has dramatically increased, driven in part by globalization, the instability of companies in a climate of mergers and buyouts, and the fact that corporations are establishing an identity on the web (Aust, 2004). Early definitions of organizational identity centered on aspects of an organization's character which are central, enduring and distinctive and give the organization specificity, stability, and coherence (Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Moingeon and Ramanantsoa, 1997). Organizational identity is grounded in an organization's history (Pratt and Foreman, 2000); it is shaped by the rites, myths and taboos of the organization (Moingeon and Ramanantsoa); it can be understood by studying an organization's values (Aust); and a multiplicity of voices within an organization can result in more than one version of an organization's identity being present (Creim, 2005; Pratt and Foreman). Hatch and Schultz (1997) argue that organizational culture is the internal symbolic context in which identity develops, with the latter defined as primarily textual, explicit, and instrumental. They define organizational culture as "the tacit organizational understandings (e.g. assumptions, beliefs, values) that contextualize efforts to make meaning, including self-definition" (Hatch and Shultz, 2002, p. 996).

With these assumptions, this study will draw on a definition of organizational identity proposed by Leuthesser and Kohli (1997): "the way in which an organization reveals its philosophy and strategy through communication, behavior and symbolism" (p. 59). This definition is grounded in the linguistic turn that has occurred in organizational studies (Creim, 2005) and has focused attention on the significance of discourse in constructing rather than mirroring reality. Creim, for example, emphasizes the importance of "narrative constructions" in organizations: they can persuade others to adopt viewpoints or to act in certain ways, legitimate group activities and outcomes, create a sense of group distinctiveness, provide norms for behavior, facilitate change by

bridging the familiar and the unfamiliar, and establish images of consistency between past, present and future. In a similar way, concerns with organizational language in constructing identity and self-presentation have led to increased emphasis on frame analysis, the study of the ways frames of meaning and motive are created and mobilized through discourse (Martin, 2002; Tannen 1993). The fact that organizational narrative constructions and frames of meaning may be visual and behavioral as well as verbal is particularly relevant when considering websites. Everything an organization says, makes, and does contributes to its identity (Baker and Balmer, 1997), and its visual communication creates frames of meaning alongside its verbal narrative. Organizational identity presentation is closely related to self-presentation, a concept that has been studied by social scientists for several decades. Winter, Saunders, and Hart (2003) note that in the past the bulk of published research on impression management focused on self-presentation by individuals, but now "there is growing interest in organizational impressions and the symbols that convey information about a firm and provide insights into organizational behavior" (p. 310).

Mission statements in particular play a central role in presenting organizational identity. While some scholars (Hartzell, 2002) make a distinction between "vision statements" and "mission statements," many researchers use the latter term to include any kind of statement that presents an organization's purpose, direction, values, goals, strategies, or philosophy. Leuthesser and Kohli (1997; see also Pearce and David, 1987) classify aspects of mission statements into four categories of sub-statements: benefits, values (or norms), self-image (how the organization wishes to be perceived), and focus (scope of activity). In this study, "mission statement" will be used to refer to any statement with those components. A mission statement, according to the president of a U.S. non-profit, should cause the people involved in an organization to believe that something larger than life is possible because of their actions and focus. The president of another organization believes that mission statements "can endow employees and other stakeholders with an uplifting purpose that connects to their inner desire to contribute to something good, great, and lasting" (American Society of Association

Executives, 2004, p. 23). In short, analysis of mission statements needs to include both structured study of elements and components, but also the kinds of statements that create an uplifting and "larger than life" sense of focus and purpose. In turn, all of these are part of the verbal, visual, and behavioral forms of identity construction that are visible on organizational websites.

Because congregations so often call themselves "communities" and because congregational identity so often seems to be connected with a positive construction of the notion of community, the social science research on community is also relevant. Cherny (1999) lists multiple definitions of the concept of community, noting that there has been "an astounding lack of consensus in the social science literature about just what is meant by the word 'community'" (p. 248). Cherny cites a 1955 comparison of 94 different definitions of community; 69 have in common the ideas that social interaction, geographic area and common ties are usually found in community life. All but three of the 94 definitions stress social interaction as a necessary element of community life. Wellman (cited in Herring, 2004) identifies three characteristics of community: sociability, support and identity. Because this study focuses on websites, which increasingly provide opportunities for online connection such as online forums and blogs, the boundaries between face-to-face community and online community must be addressed. Cherny notes that if social interaction is a requirement for the existence of community, then interest-based online groups that interact regularly in newsgroups, mailing lists, or chat conform to the requirements for social interaction as well as common ties, even if they do not share geographic area. An extensive literature explores the issue of whether online community can truly be considered community,[8]

[8] Regarding online communities, Dean (2000) quotes a definition by Reingold: "Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (p. 5). Dean draws attention to three aspects of Reingold's definition: community is an emergent property, community on the web does not refer to physical communities that use computers to link to each other, and virtual communities are often made stronger by face-to-face connections. Reingold's definition is also helpful because it points out that the coincidence of like tastes or interests is not enough to earn the label community. Other researchers identify other characteristics that relate to online communities: a core of regular participants; shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values; solidarity and support; a means of conflict resolution; self awareness of the group as an entity distinct from other groups; and

and that literature is particularly relevant for the study of religious communities that meet only online. Most congregations do not encourage online community options as ends in themselves; instead their websites communicate the view that online forums and blogs are a supplement to face-to-face congregational life, providing enrichment and opportunities for continued dialogue.

Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic (2004) make a distinction between descriptions of community that are "empirical," which describe the way community is, and "normative," which express what various people think community should be like (p. 108). They note that the concept of community is used in significantly different ways by different speakers and writers, and that experts as well as ordinary people have many different expectations about what community should be like. These expectations often form an unstated yet influential backdrop for discussions about community. In fact, the concept of community as used in the discourse of organizational identity is largely constructed from these often unstated expectations. This phenomenon is more significant in Christian settings than in many other settings, because there the concept of community functions like an "ultimate term" (Weaver, 1953) that draws on deeply held, archetypal notions of good and evil. Congregations often call themselves "communities of faith," and many diverse activities that take place in congregations are labeled as "community activities" or "opportunities to build community." The concept is almost never used in Christian settings to convey anything other than a positive construction of group relationships; it often seems to function as a discursive appeal to archetypal notions about how people should relate to one another and be connected. In this study, the websites were examined for the frequency of the use of "community" and related terms, as well as the ways the concept was discussed and presented. Much of the activity that takes under the umbrella of Christian communities has components of persuasion, and I turn now to a discussion of rhetoric, the study of persuasion.

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emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, and rituals (Herring, 2004). In addition, Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic (2004) give a helpful summary of these and other arguments about whether or not online community is "proper" community (p. 111).

The Rhetoric of the Web

In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle defined rhetoric as "an ability, in each case, to see the available means of persuasion" (1991, p. 36). In the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, the study of rhetoric focused almost entirely on persuasive speech in public settings, such as the courts and legislative bodies. In the fourth century CE, Augustine (1958) applied rhetoric to preaching, a form of public speaking but located in a new setting, the church, and with new goals, Christian conversion and Christian growth. In the Middle Ages, rhetoricians continued to study preaching but also expanded their focus of study to include written speech, particularly letters and literature (Murphy, 1974). The object of focus in rhetorical studies has continued to expand, and in the twentieth century rhetorical analysis was applied to such diverse forms of expression as architecture, public spaces, and all forms of mass media (Andrews, 1990; Leach, 2002). Principles of rhetoric can thus be used to analyze verbal texts that appear on congregational websites, such as mission statements, verbal invitations to get involved or purchase things, and other statements that exercise persuasion using words. Congregational websites increasingly offer audio-visual components, such as audio or video sermons (Larsen, 2001; Larsen, 2004). Spoken speech that has been recorded can be analyzed through the lens of rhetoric in much the same way as it has been for many centuries. Persuasion is also exercised through photographs, graphics, and other visual elements, and rhetorical analysis can be used to consider these visual components in much the same way as it might be used with newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and brochures. All the linguistic and visual resources on an organizational website can be evaluated to see, in Aristotle's words, "the available means of persuasion."

Persuasion on a website can come in the form of interactivity. Researchers emphasize that the web has discontinuity as well as continuity with previous forms of media, and one of the most significant attributes of digital media is its potential for interactivity (Bucy, 2004; Sohn & Lee, 2005; Stromer-Galley, 2000; Stromer-Galley &

Foot, 2002).[9] In his foundational work on interactivity, Rafaeli (1988) described the kind of interaction where people build on previous statements by other people. Stromer-Galley (2004) calls this "interactivity-as-process," and it can happen face to face or through digital technology such as email, instant messaging, and chat. The other form of interactivity, which she calls "interactivity-as-product" happens when a set of technological features allows users to interact with the interface or system itself, for example clicking on a hyperlink to download an audio presentation (p. 391). Massey and Levy (1999) identify these same two aspects of interactivity, using the terms "interpersonal interactivity" and "content interactivity" to distinguish them (p. 140). Interpersonal interactivity (interactivity-as-process) is facilitated on congregational websites through links to staff members' email addresses, discussion forums, and blogs that allow for dialog. Content interactivity (interactivity-as-product) is facilitated on congregational websites through site maps and search engines, as well as links to other pages within the websites and outside websites, links that allow downloads of audio or visual material, and links that allow viewers to sign up for activities or contribute money. Sundar (2004) notes, "[C]ertain forms or elements of interactive interfaces may be more successful than others in issuing calls to action" (p. 387). Warnick, Xenos, Endres, and Gastil (2005) cite numerous studies indicating that interactivity influences user response to websites.

The application of rhetorical theory to websites must explore the question of persuasion through interactivity. A website can be viewed as an invitation for the user to do something (Ha, 1998). Most of those invitations are facilitated through hyperlinks, and all links are strategic communication choices by website designers (Jackson, 1997). Strommer-Galley (2004) notes that HTML (hypertext markup language), on which the web is built, is primarily a way to deliver information in a

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[9] Stromer-Galley (2004) believes that the term "interactivity" is confusing because it is used to refer to a variety of phenomena, such as interaction between people, between people through mediated channels, between people and computers, and between computers. She notes that the first two are a type of social interaction between people, and the last two are a type of interaction that occurs between people and computer networks, and the literature conflates the two or treats them as if they belong in the same group or on the same continuum.

dynamic, nonhierarchical format. Lee (2005) defines hypertext as "computer-mediated text in which highlighted words or titles serve as links to other excerpts or modes of supporting information. . . . By these means, individuals can choose their own orders and levels of detail, and even modalities of communication materials, forming their own cohesion and sequence of information" (introduction, ¶ 2). Each user can interact with it in a unique way. For example, hyperlinks allow viewers to receive information in a range of sensory modes such as graphic, textual, video and audio. Lee notes that many studies indicate that the organization of content in a hypertext system alters learning outcomes. For example, Warnick et al. (2005) found higher levels of cognitive engagement on websites with increased content interactivity. They hypothesized that clicking on hyperlinks involves making decisions, which encourages a deeper engagement. A pilot study I conducted which included analysis of links on 33 congregational homepages showed a great diversity in the ways congregations use links. The number and kind of links on homepages varied greatly, and some congregations use graphics as well as text as hyperlinks.

Warnick et al. (2005) describe a form of interactivity on political campaign websites that is relevant to the study of congregational websites (see also Endres and Warnick, 2004). "Text-based interactivity" consists of "rhetorical techniques and features of the website text itself that communicate a sense of engaging presence to site visitors" (Warnick et al., 2005, introduction, ¶ 4). Two aspects of overall style contribute to text-based interactivity: verbal style, defined as use of active voice, first and second person address, first names, and accessible style; and visual display, defined as text boxes, captioned photographs, endorsements of third parties, and photographs of the candidate with other people. Text-based interactivity is an example of reactive or quasi interactivity described by Rafaeli (1988), which occurs when a person sends a message to another, and the other responds in a manner coherent with the original message. Endres and Warnick cite Walter Ong's observation in 1982 that as society is entering an electronic age, it may also enter a period in which orality regains the kind of significance it has in cultures untouched by writing or print. Thus,

"discourse on the Web may be more effective to the extent that it resembles speech rather than print or mass media" (p. 328), and sites that directly address the viewer in a conversational style both in text and visual elements will likely have greater persuasive appeal than sites that use the style of newspapers, magazines or TV.

Xenos and Foot (in press) have observed two other aspects of interactivity in their study of campaign websites. Interactivity as transaction highlights the possibility of customized media. As a visitor explores a site, information about the visitor's interests can be collected by noting the links that are chosen or by more direct means such as questionnaires or member registration. A second form of interactivity, welcomed particularly by younger website viewers, is coproductive interactivity; this occurs when viewers can post responses and other viewers respond to those posts. This takes place on message-boards, multi-authored blogs, and chats, where the site's content becomes a collaboration between website producers and website visitors. Coproductive interactivity reduces the amount of control that site producers exercise over content on the sites, a concern noted by electoral campaign staff. But it also has the ability to produce higher levels of engagement by site visitors. All of these forms of interactivity – interpersonal, content, text-based, transactional, and coproductive – have relevance for the study of congregational websites. All forms of interactivity exercise persuasion in one way or another, as they provide the structures that facilitate the engagement of viewers with websites and presumably with the organization that created the site.

Metaphor, analogy, metonymy, synecdoche and other tropes, or figures of speech, have long been considered in rhetorical analysis (Leach, 2002) and have relevance for the study of organizational websites. Metaphor has traditionally been defined as a verbal figure involving the transfer of sense associated with one word to another. This transfer can take place between images as well as words, and this kind of transfer is becoming increasingly important as visual communication moves increasingly into the forefront (Hayles, 2002). Burbules (1998) discusses the significance of reading hyperlinks on a website as metaphors; for example "a link from

a page listing Political Organizations to a page on the Catholic Church might puzzle, outrage, or be ignored – but considered as a metaphor it might make a reader think about politics and religion in a different way" (p. 111). Burbules notes that web links using familiar shapes can be metonymic because a particular icon begins to stand in place for a particular web page, and web links often have characteristics of synecdoche, where the particular stands in for the general, because links as gateways to information associate parts with wholes. Clusters of links can thus influence the ways people think about subjects. Burbules argues that hyperbole, another familiar trope, is common on the web. The name – World Wide Web – and the collections, archives, and search engines on the web imply a degree of comprehensiveness that is simply not possible; the very nature of web vocabulary and dynamics are hyperbolic. These all have their own sort of "deceptive naturalness" (Burbules, p. 117), and a thorough rhetorical analysis of congregational websites will expose deceptive naturalness of these tropes in verbal and visual texts and in the structure of links.

Dialogical Discourse and Heteroglossia

Other characteristics of discourse can be discovered by applying the concept of heteroglossia (Smith, 2004; Lemke, 1988; HopKins, 1989; Knoeller, 1998), and this concept is particularly helpful in revealing issues on websites of Christian congregations. Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1981), a literary critic who wrote in the 1920s and 1930s in Stalinist Russia, discussed heteroglossia in the context of dialogicality in discourse. In Bakhtin's view, all texts are dialogical in that "they set up in one way or another relations between different 'voices'" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 214). However, texts differ in the extent to which they are dialogical. A highly dialogical text demonstrates relations between the voice of the author and other voices; those other voices may be represented, responded to, and built upon or excluded and suppressed. Bakhtin used the terms "centripetal" and "centrifugal" to describe the kinds of movement that are initiated by language. Centripetal speech is a centralizing force, language that exercises a homogenizing and hierarchicizing influence on the reader or hearer. Bakhtin experienced an abundance of this kind of speech in political discourse

in Russia under Stalin; Bakhtin used the term "authoritative discourse" to describe written or spoken speech, often by an authority, that lays out one centralizing viewpoint. Centripetal speech could be considered dialogical if it refutes or excludes other voices.

In contrast, centrifugal speech spins outward, generating possibilities, embracing diverse voices, moving towards fragmentation. Bakhtin used "heteroglossia" in two ways: to describe dialogical speech in general, and also to describe the intersection point of centripetal and centrifugal forces in written and spoken speech. Heterglossia comes from "prose's three-dimensionality, its profound speech diversity" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 315). Particularly in a novel, the reader encounters speech diversity in the multiplicity of voices of the characters, with the author's voice refracted through the voices of the characters and through the narrative. Bakhtin argues that a variety of horizons, a diversity of worlds, open up through heteroglossic text:

> The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages – rather, he welcomes them into his work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 299, 300).

In literature, heteroglossia contributes to a dialogic relationship both between the author and the hero and between the reader and the characters (Bakhtin, 1994). This dialogism invites the reader to engage with diverse, hereroglossic voices of all the characters.

Bakhtin believed that the heteroglossic speech of the novel has exercised a profound influence on other genres, and will continue to do so. He uses the term "novelization" to describe this process of incorporating dialogic text into many different forms of speech, art and music (1981, p. 39). Music has always been dialogic to some extent, with Mozart paying homage to Bach by inserting small melodies and rhythms that echo themes from Bach's work. Contemporary music is highly dialogic, with the voices of earlier musicians incorporated frequently through imported bass

lines, melodies, and lyrics. The same is true in the visual arts. Perhaps no artist wants to be told that his or her art is derivative, but even the uneducated viewer of visual arts can often see styles and forms that seem to echo the voices of earlier artists. Websites stand in an artistic tradition where one artist draws upon the work of another, and web designs tend to be picked up, repeated, and used with minor modifications.

Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia as the balance point between centripetal and centrifugal forces describes the balancing act that has to occur in all Christian congregations, and this aspect of heteroglossia is a significant part of this study. Christian congregations affirm the presence of authoritative discourse in the Bible and Christian tradition, which function in a Christian community as sources of centripetal speech. Congregational leaders must also attempt to encourage the diverse gifts, services and activities of the congregation members and they must also speak the language of the culture well enough to show the ways the Christian faith connects with contemporary life; these patterns of communication contribute to centrifugal forces. This embrace of a place of tension between unity and diversity can be seen in the words of the Apostle Paul: "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (I Corinthians 12:4-6, New Revised Standard Version). Congregational leaders, in sermons, written material and in visual discourse, have to find that place of heteroglossic balance described by Bakhtin, affirming the centrality of the message of the Christian faith while encouraging diverse and culturally relevant expressions of that faith.[10]

Many of Bakhtin's concepts are helpful in examining congregational websites. On most congregational websites, a multiplicity of voices, or "profound speech diversity," can be seen and heard. Diverse people plan the congregation's events and opportunities for service and engagement, and vestiges of their voices remain in the

[10] This application of Bakhtin's theory, heteroglossia, to the tension point in congregations between a unitary voice and multiple voices was a major part of a paper I presented at the Academy of Homiletics annual meeting in December 2006 titled "Art Has Its Reasons: The Emerging Role of the Arts in Protestant Congregations."

announcements that describe those events and opportunities. Indeed, those announcements are "populated with the social intentions of others"; website producers, no matter how skilled in website design and no matter how much they are trying to produce a website with uniform characteristics, are still describing the social intentions of the people who plan the church's ministries. When considering the website from the point of view of the producers – the church leaders who set the policy for the websites and the web designers who create the layout – it seems that Bakhtin is right, that "the intentions of the prose writer [or the website producer] are refracted, and refracted at different angles" (1981, p. 300) because of the diverse voices and intentions that lie behind each component of the website. Both visual and verbal resources on a website can be considered "voices." Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) discuss the "grammar" of visual design, noting that that language of speech, such "vocabulary" and "lexis," have been applied to the analysis of visual resources (p. 1). Photos and graphics "speak." In our increasingly visual culture, interpreting the "voices" heard through photos and graphics is a significant challenge of scholars who examine texts.

Bakhtin's concept "novelization" is a thought-provoking way to describe the patchworked nature of websites. Behind each of the photos, announcements and summaries of the church's history lies a story, a small novel, or perhaps a chapter in a novel, with the story told by different people. In fact, even the official statements come out of real life situations and discussions among groups of people; a story lies behind every mission statement. Because most congregational websites use so many photographs the sense of story or novelization is close to the surface. Photos of groups of people on church websites often speak of the activities and events that are pictured, while photos of individuals often evoke emotions which imply a story that lies behind the expression on the person pictured. Heteroglossia as the balance point between centrifugal and centripetal speech can be seen in many aspects of congregational websites, as website producers seek to balance the congregation's central voice with the diverse activities, opportunities and voices of members. These ideas of

novelization, dialogicality, and heteroglossia, then, add important dimensions to this research.

Semiotics and Social Semiotics

Semiotics, another concept that reveals insights about websites and organizations, is the study of anything that can be taken to be a sign (Chandler, 2002). The study of human sign making began with Plato and other philosophers in the fourth century BCE, who explored the ways that "things stand for other things." Aristotle, around the same time, defined signs (*semeion* in Greek) as having three dimensions: the physical part of the sign itself, the referent to which it calls attention, and its evocation of a meaning (Danesi, 2002). In the fourth century CE, Augustine defined a sign as "a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses" (1958, p. 34), and classified signs as natural, conventional, or sacred. Natural signs are found in nature (e.g. the rustling of leaves or bodily symptoms). Conventional signs are made by humans (e.g. gestures, words, and symbols), and Augustine believed that conventional signs serve a fundamental human need, enabling us to refer to and remember the world. Sacred signs such as miracles, according to Augustine, convey messages from God that can only be understood through faith. In the eleventh century a debate arose between Scholastics, who argued that the truth of religious belief exists independently of the signs used to represent it, and nominalists, who argued that signs capture only illusory and human versions of the truth.

The modern study of signs began with the work of John Locke in the seventeenth century, who noted the significance of signs as a way for philosophers to understand the interconnection between representation and knowledge. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) independently laid out theories of semiotics which overlap in significant ways and which lay the groundwork for the application of semiotics to media texts today. Saussure saw the sign as a "binary phenomenon" (Danesi, p. 31),

consisting of two parts: the signifier and the signified. Peirce defined the sign as having three parts: the representamen (the form the sign takes), an object (what the representamen refers to), and the interpretant (the sense made of the sign, the meaning) (Chandler). In the twentieth century, semiotic theory was further developed by a host of semioticians, linguists, psychologists, and culture theorists, but Danesi states that the "basic Saussurean-Peircean paradigm, with its foundations in the writings of Aristotle, St. Augustine, the medieval Scholastic philosophers, and John Locke has remained intact to this day" (p. 31).

> Bignell (1997) describes the impact of signs in everyday life:
>
> From a semiotic point of view, all of social life is a continual encounter with assemblages of signs, from the public experiences of advertising posters, shop windows and diversely dressed strangers in the street, to the more private experiences of watching television, choosing what kind of décor to use in the home or playing a computer game. As we become increasingly accustomed to living in a culture infused with media, semiotics is a particularly effective means of taking stock of this situation (p. 207).

Danesi (2002) describes additional aspects of the use of signs: "Human intellection and social life is based on the production, use, and exchange of signs. When we gesture, talk, write, read, watch a TV programme, listen to music, or look at a painting, we are engaging in sign-based behavior" (p. 28). Umberto Eco defined semiotics as "the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie, because if something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; it cannot, in fact, be used to tell at all" (quoted in Danesi, p. 28). This definition emphasizes the fact that humans have the capacity to represent the world in countless ways through a multiplicity of signs, and a variety of explicit or implicit motives may underlie our choice of signs. We may desire to tell what we consider to be the truth, we may want to shape the way viewers/readers understand the world, and we may desire to guide, manipulate, or even lie. Websites are an assemblage of signs, including photos, graphics, logos, headlines, brief and long verbal texts, and hyperlinks. The physical presence of the website on a screen is a sign as well. Semiotics is one helpful way to consider the ways various components on a website contribute to meaning.

The questions posed by semiotics have been around for some time, but social changes and shifts in forms of communication are bringing new issues to the fore. Kress (1996) notes the increase in visual communication, which he believes may be caused by increased use of technology and greater multiculturalism: "The visual is becoming increasingly dominant, as the verbal is becoming less so in many areas of public communication. . . . Language has become, largely, a visual element" (p. 20 and 25). Chandler (2002) builds on this idea: "In an increasingly visual age, an important contribution of semiotics . . . has been a concern with imagistic as well as linguistic signs, particularly in the context of advertising, photography, and audio-visual media" (p. 218). A second significant shift is an increasing move toward a market mentality. Cameron (2001) notes that the capitalist free market is increasingly seen as a model for all kinds of interactions, particularly in institutional communication. Kinds of discourse that were once primarily "informational" have become more "promotional" – that is, they are no longer designed simply to "tell," but also to sell (p. 130). Many genres that used to be non-commercial now incorporate features from commercial advertising. These moves towards increasing use of visual resources in communication and increasing selling and promotion are visible on organizational websites of all kinds, including congregational websites. Semiotic analysis is helpful in considering the impact of both of these changes.

Social Semiotics

Hall (1997) uses the phrase "politics of representation" to describe the way individuals are positioned to accept the preferred or dominant reading of a text, the reading which appears to be transparent and natural and thereby goes far to establish, maintain, and perpetuate social relations of power. Hall believes that meaning is never fixed, but it is stabilized within different cultures and languages because cultures share conceptual maps. In this discursive milieu, ideology becomes embedded in the surface appearance of things and represents them as "unchangeable, inevitable and natural" (Hall, 1982, p. 76). In a related outlook, Roland Barthes (1972) uses the term "myth" to describe the ways signs communicate a social and political message about the world.

The message always involves the "distortion or forgetting of alternative messages, so the myth appears to be exclusively true, rather than one of a number of different possible messages" (Bignell, 1997, p. 22). One goal of semiotic analysis is demystification, removing the impressions of naturalness from the myth or ideology. The construction of the myth through its use of semiotic resources can be revealed in order to show the ways it promotes one way of thinking while seeking to eliminate alternative views. Social semiotic analysis can help to reveal the power structures that lie behind or are exercised through the creation of myths. In the creation of any myth, someone or some group of people benefit. Someone decides which kind of representation will be used and which reading of the text will be the dominant reading.

With this perspective, social semioticians replace "semiotic code" with "semiotic resource," a term that originated in the work of Halliday, who argues that the grammar of a language is a "resource for making meanings," not a code or set of rules for producing correct sentences (quoted in van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 3, see also Hodge & Kress, 1988). Van Leeuwen defines semiotic resources as "the actions and artifacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically – with our vocal apparatus' with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc. – or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabric scissors and sewing machines, etc." (p. 3). As soon as it becomes clear that any given type of material or activity constitutes a semiotic resource, we can describe its semiotic potential, its potential for making meaning. This potential needs to be studied in the social context, because meanings have already been introduced into society, whether they are explicitly recognized or not. Jewitt and Oyama (2001) point out that social semiotics as a tool for research becomes meaningful only when we begin to use its theories to ask questions, with three particular areas of focus: (a) the representational meaning of semiotic resources, which addresses many of the same issues as traditional semiotics; (b) the interactive meaning, which focuses on the relationship between viewer or reader and the world portrayed in the semiotic resource; and (c) the compositional meaning, which focuses on the actual structure of the text or

image being analyzed. The contribution of social semiotics to this study of websites lies in the emphasis on studying semiotic resources in their social context and the encouragement to ask questions about the interactive and compositional meaning of web texts.

Social semiotics makes an additional contribution in the area of ideology because it emphasizes the power structures at work in the social contexts in which semiotic resources are created and used. While Fairclough (2003) writes from the critical discourse analytic tradition, his definition of ideologies is relevant here: "representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation" (p. 9). The primary way this occurs is through communication patterns and processes. As a result, according to Thurlow and Jaworski (2006):

> Discourse is thus ideological in that it not only (a) construes and constitutes identities and relationships, and (b) represents and reproduces systems of belief and power, but because it (c) establishes and maintains structures of inequality and privilege. . . . [H]owever 'ideologically innocent' they may appear, texts and the social practices of which they are a part can still be tremendously powerful in reconstituting substantial areas of social life (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2006, p. 100).

Therefore, "whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too" (Voloshinov, 1973, quoted in Chandler, 2002, p. 216). Because congregational websites use collections of signs – or semiotic resources – to constitute identities and relationships and to represent systems of belief in stylized forms, issues of ideology must be considered, even though many people associated with congregational websites might not see them as ideological.

Ideology is also embedded in patterns of commerce. Fairclough (1989) points out the way that capitalism has developed over the last century: "[T]he capitalist economic domain has been progressively enlarged to take in aspects of life that were previous seen as quite separate from production. The *commodity* has expanded from being a tangible 'good' to include all sorts of intangibles" (p. 35, italics in original). The commodity mindset, Fairclough suggests, now envelops peoples' lives in

previously unimaginable ways, many of which are largely invisible and unrecognized. Myers (1999) offers similar observations, using the terminology "promotional culture" to describe the extension of the rhetoric of promotion to many spheres in Western culture, including education, politics, and religion. Congregational websites would be one example of this trend. Myers affirms Fairclough's observation that forms of promotion often appear to be natural and derived from common sense. Advertising provides a helpful illustration of the connections between the promotional culture and ideology; because organizational websites draw heavily on the advertising genre, the connections between advertising and ideology are particularly noteworthy. One of the aspects of advertising that has been naturalized is the implied relationship between the advertiser and the audience. Myers (1994) points out that advertisements make associations of meanings with commodities, and these associated meanings draw the viewer into a relationship. According to Fairclough, these relationships are hidden, they imply an ideal subject, and "actual viewers or listeners or readers have to negotiate a relationship with the ideal subject" (p. 49).

These relationships that have to be negotiated come about in part because no semiotic resource – including advertisements – is viewed in isolation. Advertisements are intertextual (Myers, 1994), drawing on other advertisements, and viewers interpret what they see in the light of countless other advertisements that have passed before their eyes (Cook, 2001). Ads, in fact, are "parasitic" (Cook, p. 33) – that is, they draw on associations from other advertisements and other genres – and viewers are positioned by advertisers to make those associations. As a result, advertisements rely on secondary orality (Ong, 1982) in a way that traditional print media do not (Cook). Ads and websites, for example, use imperatives and "you," and this approach works in part because we have grown accustomed to it in earlier advertisements (Myers). Fairclough (1989) uses the term "synthetic personalization" to describe a related strategy: the "tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' en mass as an individual" (p. 62). In a similar manner, Cameron (2000) highlights advertising's use of a deliberately casual and informal style to create the illusion of

familiarity. Synthetic personalization, this informal style that gives an illusion of familiarity, contributes to a sense of individually tailored service with the promise of individual choice (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). The backdrop of the thousands of advertisements experienced over a lifetime has taught a viewer to expect this personal approach that promises abundant options. It is both a true and false promise, of course (Schwartz, 2004).

At the heart of this dynamic is an emphasis on visual resources over words. Chandler (2002) notes that advertisements are powerful examples of the way visual images are used to make implicit claims which the advertisers would never be willing to make more openly. On some level, viewers know that photos can lie, but on some other level viewers accept the naturalized idea that photos tell the truth (Winston, 1998). Myers (1994) points out that photos evoke a non-rational response on the part of viewers and involve the viewer in the construction of meaning, which gives photos great power. In addition, according to Myers, "[P]art of the meaning of pictures comes from associations with the image and style. . . As with associations with words, these meanings arise from changing associations with the things referred to, not from the form of the image" (p. 146-147). For example, Thurlow and Aiello (2007 in press) discuss the ways European cities use assemblages of images in posters and other tourist information to promote themselves as being rich in cultural diversity, drawing on the common perception that groupings of images imply diversity. However, in the case of these European cities, very few of the images show ethnic or other minorities. Therefore, the collections of images conceal uniformity. Ultimately the goal of social semioticians with respect to visual resources is to: "critique the mechanisms of representation by which visual resources are deployed to achieve ideological ends. Social semiotics looks not only to relate texts to contexts, but also to speculate on related social tendencies and their political implications" (Thurlow and Aiello, "The current study," ¶ 3). Social semiotics, in sum, provides the tools to begin to unpack the layers of meaning on websites and the power that lies behind the creation of the meaning.

Research Questions

In 1998, when organizations were just beginning to understand the significance of the World Wide Web, Esrock and Leichty (1998) wrote, "The WWW potentially offers an organization opportunities to move beyond passive forms of self-presentation to more active forms of agenda setting with relevant publics" (p. 309). Their words have proven prescient, but academic researchers have been slow to study organizational websites. Winter et al (2003) present two reasons why the importance of websites in forming perceptions of organizations has been overlooked in academic research. First, early websites were designed by human factors and internet design experts, rather than by professionals trained in presenting corporate identity. Second, most early website research focused on usability and user satisfaction issues. Only very recently have organizational websites become an object of study for the purpose of evaluating organizational self-presentation. Winter et al write, "Websites are on-stage work areas where a performance is given to an actual or implied audience of potential customers, employees, suppliers, partners, and regulators . . . They provide frames of symbolic representations that inform and lure these potential stakeholders in to take a closer look" (p. 311). Pudrovska and Feree (2004) echo some of the same themes: "[T]he analysis of Web sites provides a new and useful form of data about an organization's identity and priorities because, unlike media representations of the group, it is self-directed. . . . Thus a Web site provides an open space for self-representation to the rest of the world" (p. 118). This study is based on the conviction that congregational websites are self-directed performances of organizational identity, designed to provide frames of symbolic representation of the congregation's philosophy and priorities, an analytic strategy modeled by Young and Foot (2005).

While the website of an organization provides an opportunity for that organization to present its identity, the website cannot be conflated with the identity of that organization. Organizations have many avenues through which they reveal their philosophy and strategy; Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) cite communication, behavior and symbolism as three of those avenues. In the case of a congregation, many other

forms of communication exist in addition to the website, some of them written and some of them oral, including newsletters, brochures, and announcements and sermons in worship services, all of which communicate aspects of the congregation's identity. In addition, all sorts of activities take place in congregations, and they reveal aspects of the congregation's identity. A comprehensive study of congregational identity would require investigation of many forms of communication, behavior and symbolism. This study seeks to explore the ways congregations present their identities on websites, an endeavor that has merit because of the increasing significance of websites in presenting organizational identity (Pudrovska and Feree, 2004, Winter et al, 2003), and because congregations are increasingly moving to websites as a central communication tool (Larsen, 2001, Larsen, 2004).

Scholarship on personal home pages raises issues that are relevant to the study of organizational websites. Like organizational websites, personal home pages are web-based, self-directed performances of identity incorporating values and priorities (Miller, 1999; Arnold and Miller, 1999; O'Sullivan, 1999). Chandler (1998) notes that "virtual selves" have existed ever since people began publishing their own writing. Plato discussed this feature of the technology of books in the *Phaedrus* and *Seventh Letter,* observing that people can encounter one's ideas in the form of a "textual self" – one's published words – without meeting the author. The web provides a setting for many more people (and institutions) to present a "virtual self." Chandler argues that personal homepages, because they are a form of asynchronous communication, are more like textual forms of communication (letters or diaries) than like speech interaction. However, this comparison to textual forms of communication is limited, because websites can also have audio-visual media components and symbolic elements. More fundamentally, however, a difference between textual forms of communication, which are often viewed as linear, and personal home pages lies in the dynamic nature of websites, particularly in the complex connections accomplished through hyperlinks. Because of hyperlinks and because of the ability to make constant changes on websites, Chandler argues that the web is an ideal medium for the purposes

of dynamic identity management. Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004) note that the constructedness and fluidity of online identities reflect a growing understanding of personal identity as "openended and a life-long project" (p. 97). In her discussion of personal websites, Döring (2002) offers a useful review of contemporary, or postmodernist, perspectives on identity, noting that scholars today tend to think of identity as a dynamic structure with multiple self-aspects, a dialogical self that is not homogenous or static. Döring notes that scholars use terms like "patchwork identity," "narrative identity," "multiple self," "dynamic self," and "dialogical self" to emphasize the components of constructedness, change and diversity present on personal home pages (see also Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic). These qualities of personal home pages – their patchworked, dynamic, dialogical, and interactive aspects, and their reflection of identity as constructed rather than fixed – are also true of many components of organizational websites.

This study focuses on congregational websites because they collect in one place many kinds of information about the congregation's philosophy and strategy that used to be, and often still are, dispersed all around church buildings: welcome brochures that sit on a table near the church entrance, photos on physical bulletin boards, invitations to involvement in weekly worship bulletins, sermons on tape in the church library, and articles by church staff and leaders in monthly newsletters (Larsen, 2001, 2004; Dart, 2001). This body of information, patchworked together on congregational websites, presents multiple aspects of congregational life and gives insight into the congregation's philosophy and strategy. The way the information is visually organized and represented on congregational websites provides additional information about the way the congregational leaders view its identity, as do hyperlinks to pages within the website and to organizations outside the congregation. This study will build on the description by Winter et al. (2003) of organizational websites as "on-stage work areas," designed to "lure potential stakeholders," and also on the words of Pudrovska and Feree (2004) about the "self-directed . . . open space for self-presentation" found on organizational websites.

This study will seek to answer two research questions. First, in what ways do congregations present their organizational identity on their websites? The definition of organizational identity by Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) cited earlier – the way in which an organization reveals its philosophy and strategy through communication, behavior and symbolism – makes clear that facets of organizational identity presentation are varied. Verbal texts on websites have the capacity to communicate many things to the viewer, and so too do the format, graphics, photos, and logos as well as the website features such as hyperlinks and other interactive components. Many earlier studies of websites looked at verbal texts alone, but this study will focus on linguistic, visual and technical/material resources on congregational sites. Analysis of visual aspects is especially important due to the frequent description of emergent churches as "image-based." Emergent churches consciously embrace features of postmodern culture, which they take to mean, in part, the need to move beyond mere words to an embrace of images as significant means of communication (Carson, 2005; Bader-Saye, 2004). This passion in the emergent church is paralleled by the increased interest during the past few decades in analyzing visual discourse as a significant and under-appreciated mode of communication, as exemplified in the work of Barthes (1972, 1981), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 1998, 1999, 2001), and Evans and Hall (1999).

Organizational websites are "material-semiotic phenomena" (Lemke, 1999, p. 24). As Kress and van Leeuven (1998) point out, texts are not merely written, they are "designed" and multimodally articulated. Linguistic, visual and technical/material resources may echo, complement, or extend one another. They may also contradict. Therefore the interplay between these components has significance for researchers of websites. Regardless of their theological orientation or the presence or absence of a desire to embrace postmodern image-making, almost all congregations uses logos, photos, a variety of graphics, and various forms of interactivity on their websites in making strategic decisions how to represent their congregations. These choices impact their presentation of their organizational identity. In this study, linguistic and visual resources on congregational websites were studied using principles from semiotics and

rhetoric, with the goal of evaluating the ways they present the congregation's philosophy and strategy, values and priorities. Statements describing organizational values, history, rites, myths, and taboos were examined. Mission statements, slogans, and other statements of priorities were studied. Frames of meaning were analyzed. Visual resources were examined at the level of denotation, connotation, and mythology. Hyperlinks, both links to pages within the site and links to outside organizations, were analyzed to determine what they indicate about priorities of the congregation and the associations valued by its leaders.

The second research question addresses the issue of persuasion. In what ways do congregations encourage and enable engagement on their websites? Christian congregations are mandated by the New Testament to "preach the gospel," to attempt to persuade individuals to engage with the Christian faith, to begin or deepen a life of Christian discipleship. In this study, several dimensions of engagement, or persuasion, were examined: (1) Persuasive appeals that encourage involvement with the congregation or with the Christian faith; appeals can be verbal or visual, explicit or implicit. (2) Internal links that enable online connection to church ministries, staff and leaders, as well as the language used in connection with these links. (3) Outlinks to community and denominational organizations, and the language associated with those links. (4) Links to online community, such as online polls, prayer request networks, bulletin boards, chat, and blogs that are related to the congregation, as well as the verbal descriptions that present the connections between online community and the kinds of face-to-face community that have been traditional in congregations for generations. (5) Interactivity, including the features that enable engagement with the website itself, including audio and video; text-based interactivity, the rhetorical techniques and features of the website text that communicate a sense of engagement to site visitors, such as casual photographs, first names, and first and second person address; and coproductive interactivity, the possibility that site viewers participate with site producers to create content for the website. These dimensions of analysis address the traditional concerns of rhetorical studies by focusing on persuasive language, but

they also address the concerns raised by internet researchers who understand that persuasion on the web involves interactivity, online community and new forms of address through linguistic and visual resources.

Chapter Three
Research Design

The object of study is congregational websites, specifically the websites of megachurches, emergent churches, and vibrant liberal/mainline churches. Most U.S. congregational websites follow a non-profit domain convention (www.nameofchurch.org). For the purposes of this study, a congregational website is defined as all of the web pages that are associated with the church's URL, www.nameofchurch.org.[11] This study had several stages of data collection. First, in order to develop a deep knowledge of these large and complex sites, over a period of three months I spent several hours daily observing six websites, two sites in each of the three categories, all of them strong exemplars of megachurches, emergent churches, and vibrant liberal/mainline churches. (See Appendix A for a list of the six churches). As I observed the sites, I began to develop a conceptual framework to describe the differences between the three kinds of congregations. Foot, Warnick and Schneider (2005) define a conceptual framework as "a set of constructs derived through retroduction between ideas and evidence" that can then be used for further study for the purposes of theory-building. Retroduction "links inductive and deductive research processes and helps overcome the dualism between them. Retroductive analysis is a dynamic, evolving process of interaction between evidence-based images and theory-derived, analytical frames that can be useful in developing empirically-grounded conceptual representations, and thus in theory-building" (introduction, ¶ 4). The conceptual framework that began to emerge from the observation of the six websites was used to create variables for a content analysis of 60 congregational websites, 20 sites randomly selected from each of the three categories. (See Appendix B for a list of

[11] In some cases, congregations use two or more domain names, and usually all of them are related to the name of the church. I used common sense to evaluate whether a hyperlink connects the viewer to a different website (an outlink) or whether a link connects the viewer to another page of the congregation's website, even if it uses a slightly different domain name (an internal link). I was able to identify the multiple domain names related to a single congregation because they were usually variations of the name of the congregation.

variables and their definitions, and Appendix C for a list of the 60 churches.) The content analysis continued the retroductive process of conceptual framework development. After the content analysis was concluded, I revisited the six original websites to continue to develop a conceptual framework using rhetorical analysis. Finally, I interviewed 10 website producers by telephone, selecting two to four churches in each of the three categories. I asked these individuals questions about how the website content is chosen or crafted for that particular congregation, particularly in the production of meaning. (See Appendix D for the list of questions used in the interviews). The purpose of the interviews was largely confirmatory, with the expectation that some new insights about power relations might also be revealed. After the content analysis, rhetorical analysis, and interviews were conducted, I revisited all the data in order to conduct a critical analysis, drawing on social semiotic principles.

The analysis of the data is presented in three stages, modeled after Thurlow and Aiello (2007 in press):

(1) Descriptive text analysis using content analytic procedures, which provides a picture of patterns of similarities and differences among 60 websites. My discussion begins, then, with an overview of the website features and vocabulary that occur on the three kinds of sites and the ways these features contribute to my conceptual framework (chapter four).

(2) Interpretive text analysis using rhetorical analysis, focused on the six websites I studied for three months, each of them strong exemplars of the three kinds of congregations. This analysis continues to present patterns in features and vocabulary that contribute to the conceptual framework of this study, interpreting the patterns in the ways the features and vocabulary are used on the sites (chapter five).

(3) Critical text analysis drawing on semiotics and particularly social semiotics. The patterns that emerged through content analysis and rhetorical analysis were considered again, with the addition of data

> from the interviews. The goal was to consider the links between the semiotic strategies used and the political-cultural economy of the congregations studied, including the power relations which frame the practices of congregational branding (chapter six).

These three stages of data analysis provide a picture of the websites of the three kinds of congregations that is multidisciplinary and multi-perspectival. On the one hand, these analyses provide different lenses to understand the website texts and the corresponding congregations. At the same time, the analysis gets progressively "deeper" with each approach. That is, the content analysis identifies manifest content on the sites, the rhetorical analysis considers issues of meaning construction, and the critical analysis incorporates the producers and the social and cultural settings that influence website content. The process of retroduction continued throughout the research, with ideas from one part influencing other aspects of the study, with the goal of presenting a unified picture of the ways these congregations express their organizational identities and exercise persuasion.

Descriptive Analysis using Content Analysis

Content analysis, the "systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1), was used to evaluate a representative sample of websites. Empirical inquiry into the content of communication dates back at least to the 1600s, when church officials examined the content of newspapers and other documents looking for heresy. With the growth of newspaper publishing in the last century, content analysis has also increased in popularity as a research method (McMillan, 2000). This method can be used to examine a wide variety of characteristics of messages. It is a "technique for making inferences from a focal text to its social context in an objectified manner. . . . Content analysis allows us to construct indicators of worldviews, values, attitudes, opinions, prejudices and stereotypes, and compare these across communities" (Bauer, 2002, p. 133, 134). In this study, content analysis was used to code for a wide range of linguistic, visual and technical/material

resources on congregational web sites. A number of scholars have written about the ways to adapt classic content analysis to the web, among them Bauer (in addition, see Herring, 2004; McMillan, 2000; Mitra, 1999: Van Selm and Jankowski, in press), and I drew on their work. One of the specific issues related to content analysis of web texts, delineated by Van Selm and Jankowski, is the need for coders to conduct analysis at the same time and at the same kind of computer/monitor or to use archived websites, because web content changes and looks different on different machines. For this project, I coded websites live, and I also archived all homepages of the sites I examined.

Bauer (2002) describes four research strategies that can be adopted in content analysis. Three of them are relevant for this study. First, comparisons between different texts can reveal patterns of similarities or differences. In this study, content analysis revealed such patterns in the philosophy and strategy of the three kinds of congregations – in particular the linguistic and visual resources used. Second, Bauer notes that content analysis can be used to construct indices, which are signs that are causally related to some other phenomenon. Indeed, the identified patterns were indicators of the congregational values and priorities. Third, Bauer writes that content analysis can be used to reveal "maps of knowledge" that are embedded in texts. To do this, "content analysis may have to go beyond the classification of text unity and work towards networking the units of analysis to represent knowledge not only by element, but also in their relationships" (Bauer, 2002, p. 135). These maps of knowledge overlap with the ideologies and worldviews of the congregations. I have sought to make observations about the relationships in my data and to formulate maps of knowledge related to these three kinds of congregations and their philosophy and strategy.

To increase confidence in the data collected, I conducted inter-coder reliability tests. After the variables were formulated, I recruited a web designer who frequently designs congregational websites to work with me as a second coder. She and I met for seven hours over the course of a week to test the variables I had created. We coded several congregational websites together, then we coded nine sites at the same time but

in different rooms. After every two or three sites, we compared our results and discussed the definitions of the variables. As a result of those hours of working together, I deleted some variables, combined, changed and added some others and rewrote some of the definitions, resulting in a total of 110 variables. Then, over the course of the next four weeks, I coded 16 sites in each category of congregation (a total of 48). Then my second coder and I coded four of these sites in each group simultaneously (a total of 12 sites, 20% of the total) to check for inter-coder reliability for each variable.

Inter-coder reliability was calculated in two ways. Agreement records the percentage of instances in which both coders observed either the presence or absence of a variable. Scott's Pi is a statistical calculation that factors in the consideration that random chance would result in a certain percentage of identical codes. Table 3.1 shows the breakdown for the inter-coder reliability for the variables. The totals for two of the variables were combined, resulting in a total of 109 variables, four of which were eliminated after the inter-coder reliability tests. Intercoder reliability above 60% agreement, with Scott's Pi of greater than .3, is viewed as acceptable in content analysis, particularly in this instance, where 89% of the remaining variables have a percent agreement of above 80%, with Scott's Pi of greater than .65 (Neuendorf, 2002).

Table 3.1. Intercoder Reliability

Percent agreement	Scott's Pi	number of variables
100%	1.0	46
greater than 90%	greater than .8	31
greater than 80%	greater than .65	16
greater than 70%	greater than or equal to .5	8
greater than 60%	greater than .3	4
less than 60%	less than .2	4 (eliminated from study)

Of the 105 remaining variables, 79 examine characteristics of the website's homepage: 51 variables describe features of the homepage such as number and kind of photos, graphics, types of information present, and the labels of links; and 28 variables examine vocabulary or concepts expressed in the verbal text on the homepage. The remaining 26 variables examine verbal text on other pages and are almost identical to the 28 variables that examine text on the home page. (See Appendix B for a list of the variables and their definitions.) I looked for other pages on the websites that were explicitly for newcomers/visitors, that expressed the congregation's mission statement, or that listed Frequently Asked Questions and their answers, and I copied the text into a Word file. Then I searched for the words and concepts in the variables. In the Word file, I added any text off the homepage that described the congregation's ministry in some detail. I combined all the text I copied off the sites into Word files for each of the three kinds of churches. Notably, the combined texts from the emergent church websites was longer than the text from the other two types of congregations. This was so because emergent churches described their mission on their websites in much more detail than the other two kinds of churches, whereas several of the megachurches offered videos that described their congregations. While I coded for the presence or absence of video, I did not look at video verbal content.

Table 3.2. Verbal Text Retrieved from Websites

Type of Church	Word count of verbal text related to mission
Emergent Churches	27,724
Megachurches	16,627
Vibrant Liberal/Mainline Churches	14,621

After coding the 60 websites, I entered the data into an Excel spread sheet and calculated the mean score for each variable for each of the three kinds of congregations. I used the statistical analysis software SPSS to calculate a oneway

Anova for each variable, which indicates the significance of the difference between the means, e.g. whether or not the differences between the means are likely to have occurred by chance or whether they are likely be able to be attributed to the differences between the websites.

Interpretive Analysis using Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis begins with a close reading of the text to be examined, with "patience in the search for details" (Reid, 1944, p. 422), which enables the rhetorical scholar to unpack discourses and evaluate why they are persuasive. Good rhetorical analysis has two components: attention to the particular, specific and local; and an affinity for normative conclusions (Leach, 2002). In order to reach those conclusions, rhetorical scholars consider the audience, the type of discourse, and the exigence of the discourse, which is the imperfection, obstacle, or urgency that lies behind the motivation for the text (Leach). Another set of issues to be considered comes from the work of Aristotle (1991): ethos, the credibility of the author; pathos, the appeal to emotion; and logos, the validity of the logic that undergirds the arguments used. Analyzing the argument includes considering the history of the issues that underlie the argument and noting the structure of the argument, requiring an appraisal of the techniques used and the ends advocated, as well as the immediate and long-range effects of both (Andrews, 1990). Andrews lists several dozen questions that may be used as a part of the rhetorical analysis of a text. The questions that are relevant to websites include the following, which have been adapted for this study: What political, social, or economic factors, and what cultural values and practices, are relevant to the text? What is the implied purpose of the text? What are the individual arguments and how are they constructed? What forms of support are used to promote conclusions? What can be discerned about desirable audience response? How can the text's tone, level of complexity, and texture be described? What are the social and cultural elements within the text that bear upon ethos formation? What devices, techniques, or strategies are employed to enhance the ethos? All these questions, as applied to

websites, assume that "texts" in general, and the texts under study include linguistic, visual and technical/material resources.

After I conducted the content analysis of 60 websites, I returned to the six websites that I had examined for three months before the content analysis. (See Appendix A for a list of the six congregations.) I used the questions listed above and revisited the issues explained in the earlier section, "The Rhetoric of the Web." I also began a more systematic study of rhetorical analysis and its many theories in order to find language and concepts to explain the differences I had observed. I chose three rhetorical theories – genre, audience, and heteroglossia – and one concept – community – to use as frameworks for discussion of the differences and similarities I observed. As is common in rhetorical analysis, I drew both on rhetorical theorists and also on theorists with roots in other fields, in this case, Kress and van Leeuwen (1999), who are critical discourse analysts. The many details I had observed in the three months of concentrated study of the sites fueled this analysis, giving me the particular, specific, and local observations needed for the analysis, and the theorists I used helped me make normative conclusions about the ways the congregations use their websites to present identities and exercise persuasion (Leach, 2002).

Critical Analysis

For the critical analysis, I revisited all the data gathered and the conclusions reached through content analysis and rhetorical analysis. I also considered the information gained in the interviews. I looked at this data using semiotic and social semiotic analysis. Semiotic, or semiological, analysis "provides the analyst with a conceptual toolkit for approaching sign systems systematically in order to discover how they produce meaning" (Penn, 2000, p. 227). The key questions asked by semioticians are: What kinds of signs are used in human communication? In what ways do they represent meaning, construct meaning, and influence our understanding of reality? In what ways do they contribute to our values and priorities without our engagement of conscious thought? These questions shaped and informed the critical

analysis of websites in this study. By observing the distinctions between denotation, connotation, and myth/ideology, semiological analyses can make apparent the relationship between "surface content" and "interpretive content." "The semiological account sharpens and makes explicit that which is implicit in the image" (Penn, 2000, p. 241). Barthes (1977) writes that "the viewer of the image receives at one and the same time the perceptual message and the cultural message" (p. 36). In the comparative analysis of websites from the three kinds of congregations, semiological analysis helped in discerning the cultural message or myth – particularly as it relates to organizational identity and persuasion/engagement – being presented on the websites. Because these congregations are situated in a capitalistic consumer culture, the cultural messages regarding consumption that lie behind so many forms of communication had to be considered.

I also drew heavily on social semiotic principles to conduct the critical study of stage three. In the area of representational meaning, social semioticians consider the narrative, conceptual, and symbolic structure of both photos and verbal text. When considering interactive meaning, the analyst considers the way the viewer or reader is invited to engage with images and verbal text. This includes the point of view in photographs, and the distance from and the gaze of the people pictured. When considering the compositional meaning of linguistic and visual resources, the researcher explores the informational value, framing, and salience of the semiotic resource, as well as the modality, which considers the issue of how true or how real a given sign or set of signs within a text or image should be taken to be (van Leeuwen, 2005; Jewitt and Oyama, 2001). Two aspects of the work of the semiotician are (a) to collect, document and catalogue semiotic resources, including their history and (b) to examine the ways these resources are used in specific contexts and how people talk about them in these contexts, how they are planned, taught, justified, and critiqued (van Leeuwen, 2005). In the third stage of this research, social semiotics provided a framework for integrating all the data with the interviews of site producers. As van Leeuwen has indicated, semiotic resources are used in "specific historical, cultural and

institutional contexts" (2005, p. 3). The interviews helped to explore the specific settings in which the sites were created, and shed light on how site producers plan, teach, justify, and critique the way they use semiotic resources.

An additional contribution of social semiotics to this study of congregational websites lies in the issues of ideology and power relations. The cultural narratives or myths that are presented on websites work to establish, maintain, and/or change power relations for someone or some group of people and their worldview. Social semiotic analysis situates semiotic resources in a social environment where power is at work, and this analysis helps to address a series of questions. In what ways do the cultural messages or myths on congregational websites establish power? In what ways do they maintain or change power? Who are the people who benefit from that power? In what ways do they benefit? Who is being dominated or exploited? In what ways do these power relations on congregational websites mirror power relations in the wider society? In what ways are these power relations distinct from the wider society and unique to congregations? What are the connections between power relations and economic interests, and in what ways do congregations engage in capitalistic pursuits? Is religion being commodified? These are some of the questions that I considered in the critical analysis of the websites, integrating the results of the whole study with the interviews by site producers. It may be tempting to view congregational websites as sources of information and windows into congregational culture, providing informational resources that are quite free of power relations, but the convictions of social semiotics force us to delve deeper into the cultural and ideological dynamics at work.

Bounding the Sample

I began my data collection by observing six congregational websites in order to generate variables for the content analysis of a larger number of sites. These same six websites provide the data for the rhetorical analysis, presented in chapter five. I chose websites from congregations which serve as strong exemplars of each of the three types

of congregations considered in this study. Of the megachurches in the United States, two stand out as leaders of the movement: Willow Creek Church in the suburbs of Chicago and Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California (Wilson, 2000; Yancey, 2005; the Church Report, 2005), and I chose them for analysis. For emergent churches, a core group of churches were identified as follows. *Christian Century* magazine (2005) reported that the emergent movement's four-person board of directors recently appointed a national coordinator of the movement, Tony Jones. With the board of directors, Jones established a website, emergentvillage.org, which listed eight congregations considered to be emergent.[12] Jones, a senior research fellow at Princeton Theological Seminary, reported to me in an email on October 22, 2005, that in his own research, he was studying eight emergent congregations, five of them the same as the ones on the website and three of them different. In order to select two websites to study in depth, I began by listing the five congregations that appear both on emergentvillage.com and on Tony Jones's list, concluding that all five must be strong exemplars of the movement because they appear on both lists. Because I wanted the most complex and rich websites in this category in order to have the maximum possible amount of written and visual text to study, I examined the five websites and counted the total number of pages on each website.[13] The number of pages I was able to find on each website ranged from 20 to 110, and I chose the two sites with the highest number: Cedar Ridge Community Church in Maryland (110 pages on its site) and Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis (70). For vibrant liberal/mainline churches, I chose from among the congregations identified by Wellman (2002), who had selected congregations based upon recommendations by denominational leaders, so the sample represented strong exemplars of these churches. I have attended worship services several times at one of the churches, so I ruled it out, not wanting my personal experience to influence the way I studied the websites. Of the remaining five, I counted the number of pages I could find on their sites, again because I wanted websites with

[12] On October 1, 2005.
[13] On June 13, 2006.

the greatest possible amount of text and images to study. I counted 26 to 70 pages on the five websites. Two of the churches had 70 pages, so I chose them: St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco and Seattle First Baptist.

For the content analysis presented in chapter four, I first constructed larger samples for each type of congregation, then selected 20 congregations randomly. For megachurches, I accessed Scott Thumma's database at Hartford Seminary of more than 1200 megachurches, some in Canada, and some with 1800 to 2000 members in attendance on Sunday mornings. I ruled out the Canadian churches and those with less than 2000 in attendance, because 2000 is the cutoff in the most commonly used definition of megachurch (Chaves, 2004). I wanted churches that were generally evangelical in theology; very few megachurches are liberal, but Thumma's sample does include a small number, mostly in mainline denominations. Thumma's database can be sorted by denomination. I randomly chose congregations from denominations that have historically been viewed as evangelical, plus a few nondenominational churches.[14]

To construct the larger sample of emergent churches, I studied the websites of the 11 emergent churches mentioned on www.emergentvillage.org and in Tony Jones's research. Several of those 11 sites have lists of other churches they consider to be emergent. I collected the lists of all the churches named on those sites, added them to the 9 sites remaining on the original list after I had chosen 2 for close analysis at the beginning of my research, resulting in a list of 35 churches. I removed one from consideration because it is a megachurch, two others because they are outside the

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[14] I downloaded the database on July 17, 2006 from http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_database_denom.html. I randomly chose one congregation each from the following denominations that traditionally draw on evangelical theology: Foursquare, Assemblies of God, Calvary Chapel, Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed Church, Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Free, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Missionary Baptist, Church of the Nazarene, Presbyterian Church in America, Reformed Church in America, and Vineyard Churches. I randomly chose two Southern Baptist Churches because of the very large number of SBC churches on the database. I also randomly chose four nondenominational churches because of the large number of nondenominational churches on the list. To make random choices for this and the other parts of the sample, I used www.randomizer.org.

United States and one other because its website was not functioning. I then randomly selected 20 from the remaining congregations.

To assemble a list of vibrant liberal/mainline churches, I asked leaders of gay and lesbian advocacy groups in six mainline denominations to identify congregations they consider to be vibrant.[15] This strategy was used because the issue of gay rights is currently one of the defining issues in the liberal-evangelical divide (Rogers, 2006; Myers and Scanzoni, 2005; Marston, 2005). Adding the four websites from the Wellman (2002) research that were as yet unselected in this research, I was able to assemble a list of 141 liberal/mainline churches judged by leaders within their denominations as vibrant. After ruling out several whose websites were not functioning or which did not have websites, I randomly selected 20.

For the interviews of website producers, I began by contacting the six congregations I studied in the most depth by email or by phone in order to arrange interview times. I was able to conduct phone interviews of the website producers of three of those six congregations. I then began contacting congregations from the list of 60 congregations studied in the content analysis, both by email and by phone. I chose congregations whose websites had particularly intrigued or interested me. I was able to conduct an additional seven phone interviews, resulting in a total of 10 website producers (two from one emergent congregation), who represent two emergent congregations, three vibrant liberal/mainline congregations, and four megachurch congregations. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to one hour. Because of the restrictions required by the Internal Review Board of the University of Washington, I was not able to record the interviews. Instead, I took notes as I talked with the site producers by phone. (See Appendix D for a list of the questions used in the interviews.)

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[15] The denomination of the advocacy groups that responded and the number of churches they nominated: American Baptist, 9; United Methodist, 24; Presbyterian Church (USA), 15; UCC, 36; Episcopal, 11; Evangelical Lutheran, 42.

Chapter Four

Worldviews and Values: A Descriptive Analysis of Sixty Congregational Websites

Organizational websites use photos, words of invitation, mission statements, descriptions of activities, links to pages within the website, and links to outside organizations to communicate the uniqueness of their organization and to convey an invitation to engage in some way with their goals. Congregations, a particular type of organization, use websites to serve two audiences, potential visitors and current members/attenders, and they use linguistic and visual resources strategically to address those two audiences. Based on an in-depth study of six congregational websites, and after working with a website designer to refine my ideas, I came up with a list of more than 100 website features, including photographs, kinds of verbal content, specific words, and types of links that appear on many congregational websites. This chapter reports on the results of a study of 60 websites using the research method of content analysis. Each of the websites was examined for the more than 100 features.[16] The 60 websites – 20 each from distinct samples of megachurches, vibrant liberal/mainline churches, and emergent churches – are closely representative of the three kinds of congregations. As a result, generalizations can be made with some confidence from the data. These data are descriptive; they present an overview of the website features and vocabulary that occur on the three kinds of sites and the ways these features contribute to my conceptual framework. Content analysis can provide "indicators of worldviews, values, attitudes, opinions, prejudices and stereotypes, and compare these across communities" (Bauer, 2002, p. 133, 134), and the variables presented in this chapter

[16] Homepages of the 60 church websites were examined for verbal text, photos, graphics, and links. In addition, pages that had information for newcomers; statements of the congregation's vision, purpose or values; or frequently asked questions were examined for verbal text only. The additional pages are called "other pages" in the tables in this chapter.

function as indicators that reveal much about the identities of the congregations studied.

This chapter is organized around clusters of features and words that are related to each other and that reveal significant differences or similarities between the groups of congregations. Issues related to website structure, online community and congregational community are presented first. The large number of website features on the megachurch sites, coupled with a lower number of internal links, reveal aspects of megachurch strategy. The emergent church commitment to both online and face-to-face community is evident. Next, the ways that congregations welcomed newcomers and encouraged engagement are discussed. All three kinds of congregations employed strategies to extend a welcome and encourage engagement, but the way they went about these endeavors was distinctly different. The visual features on websites and congregations' embrace of the arts are considered next, with an emphasis on the megachurches' use of numerous photos, the vibrant liberal/mainline churches' use of denominational graphics and photos of their buildings, and the emergent churches' engagement with the arts. Lastly, congregational values revealed through words such as "justice" and "authenticity" are presented. All of these patterns in features, visuals, and verbal statements reveal insights about the congregations' self-presentation on their websites.

The New Orality and Online Community

Megachurches have budgets that are much larger than vibrant liberal/mainline or emergent churches, so in most cases they have more money to spend on their websites. Therefore it would be logical to expect that their websites would be more complex in features, visuals, and graphics than the websites of the other churches. Content analysis of 11 website features shows that indeed the megachurch homepages did have more photos, more graphics, and more internal links than the other two types of churches; they were more likely to use slideshows (in which photos or graphics take turns occupying the same space) or video on their homepage; and they were more

likely to have links to audio, video and/or podcasts (see Table 4.1). Megachurches did not have more outlinks on their homepages, though. Both the vibrant liberal/mainline church sites and the emergent church sites had more outlinks (14.9% and 16.3% of total links respectively), with emergent churches having the most. On megachurch websites, outlinks were only 5.1% of total links. The lack of a high number of outlinks that would correspond with their high number of internal links suggests the self-sufficiency of the megachurches. The outlinks on the vibrant liberal/mainline homepages often provided connections to denominational resources and local community organizations, while the outlinks on the emergent homepages were more likely to provide connections to resources that are online only, such as Mapquest or online Bible resources, with some links to local community organizations. These outlinks provide insights into the way these the three kinds of congregations presented their identites: the megachurches as self-sufficient, the vibrant liberal/mainline churches as connected to their denominations and surrounding communities, and the emergent churches as connected electronically to the online world while still connected to their local communities.

Table 4.1. Complexity of Website

Mean on homepage	Megachurches (n=20)	Vibrant liberal/mainline (n=20)	Emergent (n=20)	Significance (*p*=)[17]
Number of photos	7.9	3.3	5.0	.042*
Number of graphics	5.4	2.2	3.0	.012*
Number of internal links	33.5	15.7	20.6	.008*
Number of outlinks	1.8	2.8	4.0	.242
Total number of links	35.3	18.4	24.6	.029*
Outlinks as a percentage of total links	5.1%	14.9%	16.3%	.036*
Percent of websites with element on homepage				
Use of slideshow	55%	0%	20%	.000**
Use of video	20%	0%	5%	.059
Link to audio/video/podcast	80%	5%	40%	.000**
Links in the form of graphics	75%	45%	65%	.144
Links to newsletter	50%	65%	10%	.001*
Links to virtual community[18]	5%	0%	55%	.000**

Turning to another feature shown in Table 4.1, the vibrant liberal/mainline homepages had the most links to a newsletter or weekly bulletin, often in the form of a PDF file, indicating that the bulletin or newsletter was likely produced on paper and scanned for the website. The megachurch homepages also had a relatively high number of links to newsletters and bulletins, which were more likely to be in electronic form and appear to have been produced for the website, rather than having been produced

[17] Throughout this chapter, one asterisk is used after the calculation of significance to indicate that the result is less than .05, which is believed by statisticians to indicate that these results are not likely to have happened by chance. Two asterisks are used to indicate a much higher standard of statistical probability, with *p* value of less than .001.

[18] A link to virtual community was defined as a link that connects the viewer to a blog, chat, poll, message board, or group (such as a yahoo group).

for distribution on paper first. The emergent sites were the most likely to offer forms of online connection. For example, Matthew's House homepage was in the form of a blog, with posts by various congregation members about events and activities. One member posted a brief book review on the Matthew's House homepage, and another member commented on the homepage, thanking the reviewer for "sending this book my way."[19] More than half of the emergent church homepages offered links to blogs, chat or message boards, with a few of those also offering online polls on their homepage. These opportunities for online community through the congregation contrast with much of the research on religious online community. Campbell (2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2005) has noted that people of faith who engage in online religious community are likely to be involved both in a local congregation and in online community that is not related to the congregation and that offers some kind of connection that the congregation cannot offer. She cites the example of visually impaired people who are involved in their congregation but also enjoy spiritual connection online with other people who are visually impaired. She argues that religious leaders need not be afraid that online religious community will damage or compromise the ministry of congregations because different needs are met in each setting (see also Bazin & Cottin, 2003). The emergent churches in contrast demonstrated interest in both face-to-face connection and online community.

These patterns – online community on the emergent church websites, links to PDF newsletters on the vibrant liberal/mainline websites, and many internal links but relatively few outlinks on the megachurch websites – reveal significant differences between the three kinds of congregations' self-presentation. The emergent church websites were most likely to provide places where the voices of congregation members can be heard, while the megachurch sites provided numerous options for activity without allowing many voices to be heard. These patterns relate to Ong's (1982) concept of secondary orality. Ong argues that as we move into a technological age, we may also be entering into a period of secondary orality, related to the forms of orality

[19] In Oceanside, CA. Downloaded October 19, 2006.

that are present in cultures that are untouched by writing and print. Ong believes that "this new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of communal sense, its concentration on the present moment" (p. 136). These characteristics of oral communication found in cultures without writing – participatory, communal and present-oriented – are helpful to consider when evaluating websites. Endres and Warnick (2004) argue that, "If Ong's predictions are correct, postings to the internet should differ from print-based communication in how they address their audiences, the ways their discourse is structured, their potential for interactivity, their reliance on context for understanding, and their emphasis on action and on effects. . . . [D]iscourse on the web may be more effective to the extent that it resembles speech rather than print or mass media" (p. 327, 328). Through the immediacy of online community, the emergent churches embraced the new orality by providing places for congregational voices on their websites, resulting in "fostering of communal sense" (see the discussion of community below). The megachurches embraced the new orality on their sites in the ways they address their audience through photos, graphics, and their emphasis on action (see also the discussion of engagement below). Of the three kinds of churches, the vibrant liberal/mainline sites relied the most on traditional models based in writing and print.

Community

Continuing the discussion of themes related to community, I now turn to the ways the websites used three words. A focus on "community," "connect," and "relationship" enable the exploration of key concepts on congregational websites (see Table 4.2). These words were always used positively, expressing the congregations' affirmation of the positive value of community connections and relationships. The emergent churches used these three words the most frequently, indicating a significant priority and orientation for their congregations. They also discussed the concept of community with the most depth and theological grounding. The patterns in the use of these three words also reveal interesting alliances between the types of congregations.

All but one of the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations and all but one of the emergent congregations used "community" to refer to the congregation, while only 13 megachurches did so.[20] However, the megachurches and the emergent churches used the other two words, "connect" and "relationship" much more frequently than the vibrant liberal/mainline churches did. Many of the same themes ran through the way these words were used, but some differences between the three kinds of churches could be seen as well.

Table 4.2. Community

Percent of websites with element [21]	Megachurches (n=20)	Vibrant liberal/mainline (n=20)	Emergent (n=20)	Significance (*p=*)
Use of "community" referring to congregation	65%	95%	95%	.008*
Use of "connect" or "connection"	60%	15%	75%	.000**
Use of "relationship" or "relational"	60%	25%	70%	.010*

The megachurch websites laid out the basic issues related to community. "Hope Chapel is a community of people who love God and are actively committed to loving and caring for one another."[22] This statement revealed two components to Christian community that recur on all three kinds of church websites: loving God and loving others. Sometimes only one of two emphases appeared: "The vision of Christ the Rock Community Church is to grow as a community devoted to passionately pursuing

[20] Another variable considered the use of the word "community" to refer to the neighborhood or people around the church. There were no significant differences in the way the congregations used "community" in that sense.
[21] These words were examined for their presence on either the homepage or the other pages that were downloaded.
[22] In Hermosa Beach, CA. Downloaded October 26, 2006.

God."[23] The Salem Alliance website affirmed the unfinished journey aspect to community: "We're a community of people who are on a faith journey together. We're all at different stages. None of us have 'arrived.' But together we're experiencing the joy of entering into the love of God."[24] Loving God, loving others, and journeying together occurred repeatedly on the 60 websites in this study. Bayside Covenant Church added a perspective that was found only on megachurch sites, linking "solid teaching and heartfelt worship" as "key ingredients to Christian community."[25] This emphasis on teaching as a part of Christian community parallels the megachurches' greater likelihood to feature a link on the homepage to a statement of belief (see below under "Other Values").

The vibrant liberal/mainline websites coupled their passion for inclusion and diversity with their discussions of community. An example was First Congregational UCC Columbus: "Our faith community seeks to unite persons of all ages, races, nationalities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, mental and physical abilities, socioeconomic levels, and political theological backgrounds."[26] The journey metaphor was present for St. Peter's Lutheran Church, and it was linked with inclusion and caring for others:

> Welcome to St. Peter's Church, an evangelical-catholic communion of diverse people and communities publicly seeking God's nourishment and creatively shaping life in the city. . . . St. Peter's is a caring community, supporting and encouraging its members, the needy of the city, and the arts.[27]

The fact that St. Peter's used the plural form, "communities," as well as the singular form enhanced the emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Another congregation connected life struggles, caring for one another, and serving Christ in its statement about community: "Grace Lutheran Church is a spiritual community that celebrates the

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[23] In Menasha, WI. Downloaded November 8, 2006.
[24] In Salem, OR. Downloaded October 31, 2006.
[25] In Granite Bay, CA. Downloaded November 10, 2006.
[26] In Columbus, Ohio. Downloaded November 8, 2006.
[27] In New York City, NY. Downloaded October 19, 2006.

gifts of God that empower us to engage in the struggles of life, to care for one another, and to serve Christ where we work or live."[28]

The kind of analysis conducted notes only the presence or absence of the word "community" on the homepage or on other pages. Nineteen of the emergent church sites, the same number as the vibrant liberal/mainline churches, used "community" in the homepage or on other pages. This kind of analysis obscures the fact that the emergent churches used the word community much more frequently on their homepages and other pages. They discussed community in similar ways to the other two kinds of churches, linking community with loving God, caring for people in the congregation, and caring for the needy and others outside the congregation. However, they also discussed community as an integral part of who they are. For example, the Church at Matthew's House said, "To us, church is a way of life – a life lived in the reality of God, in community with each other and in order to bless the world."[29] Reba Place Fellowship said, "We see ourselves as a community trying to believe, teach, and obey everything that Jesus commanded."[30] Wounded Healer Fellowship said, "We believe that we are not so much called to 'go to church' but to 'be the church' as a community."[31] And Vintage Faith said, "Without community we would cease to be a church."[32] These statements are more forceful in identifying community with the essence of the congregation than are found on the other two kinds of church sites.

The emergent churches, according to these sites, based this passion for community in their understanding of theology, illustrated in this quotation: "God exists in perfect community of Father, Son, and Spirit. People were also created to live in community. Missiongathering seeks to build deep and personal faith by serving others in a loving and authentic faith community."[33] This same theological basis was echoed by Mosaic: "God is communal. Because we all bear the image of the creator, the need

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[28] In Minneapolis, MN. Downloaded October 25, 2006.
[29] In Oceanside, California. Downloaded October 19, 2006.
[30] In Evanston, IL. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[31] In Pembroke Pines, FL. Downloaded October 13, 2006.
[32] In Santa Cruz, CA Downloaded October 17, 2006.
[33] In San Diego, CA. Downloaded October 14, 2006.

for community resides deep in our being. Unfortunately true community rarely 'happens' – particularly in our culture, where heroic individualism rules the day. Community must be nurtured."[34] The Mosaic website, in another place, affirmed that its community was grounded in people, not place: "While we use our space at 9th and Trinity on Sunday evenings for liturgy, conversation, meals and events, we are very aware that our community is present wherever the people of Mosaic find themselves. We are not defined by our meeting together, but by sharing life."[35] The nature of this community, according to The Bridge, must be honest and authentic:

> We value our community-our relationships with each other. We don't want to be a "Hi, how are you,"-"Hi, I'm doing great," cheesy-smile, fake-plastic Jesus kind of place. [sic] We want to really know and care for each other-and grow in our life and faith because of it.[36]

Community on the emergent church websites, then, is presented as connected to the nature of God and must be honest and nurtured intentionally. In addition, according to these sites, this form of community will be connected to mission; the words "mission" and "missional" appeared on several sites as they discussed community,[37] words that are commonly associated with emergent church priorities (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005; Carson, 2005). For example, Vintage Faith said, "We believe the Scriptures teach that the church is not a building or a location, but the people of God on a mission."[38] For the emergent churches, community as described on their websites was grounded in the triune nature of God and thus was integrally connected to their identity as people created in the image of God. Community involved loving God and loving others, being honest on the journey together, sharing life with each other, and serving God in the world.

Community, in short, involved connections, and the megachurch and emergent church websites made that association in similar ways. "Connect" was found on

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[34] In Austin, TX. Downloaded October 14, 2006.
[35] Downloaded October 14, 2006.
[36] In Pontiac, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[37] "Missional" is a key concept for emergent churches. *Leadership* journal, a journal for evangelical pastors, focused its Winter 2007 issue on "Going Missional."
[38] In Santa Cruz, CA. Downloaded October 17, 2006.

megachurch and emergent church sites in links to various opportunities. It was found in statements of goals and mission statements; for example, the homepage of the emergent congregation Three Nails in Pittsburgh had a brief statement that could perhaps be identified as its mission statement: "Connect. Experience. Live." The word was also used in reference to God: "Connecting people to God . . . That's what New Life [an emergent church] is all about. We want to help you connect to God and form strong relationships with people in your life" (ellipsis in original).[39] Several examples illustrate the use of "connect" in reference to various aspects of congregational life: "Connect with the speaker (not always the pastor) opening up the Bible and taking a real-life look at what these words mean to us today" (The Bridge, an emergent church).[40] "Are you looking to connect more deeply in the church family? Visit any one of the 22 groups that meet Saturday evenings or Sunday mornings" (Salem Alliance, a megachurch).[41] "Connecting at Vineyard Church North Phoenix [a megachurch] is made simple through the many opportunities we offer in ministry, groups, involvement, and community outreach. Join us as we draw closer to God . . . together" (ellipsis in original).[42] The word "connect," then, was used to reference relationship with God as well as a variety of relationships within the congregation.

The megachurches and emergent churches also used "relationship" in similar ways, often referring to a desire to nurture people's relationship with God and with each other. One example on a megachurch site comes from King of Kings Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), which had a list of 10 values. One of them was "relational discipleship in our everyday lifestyle in our community and in the world."[43] A second megachurch example is North Coast Church (Evangelical Free Church) which mentioned the "host of opportunities for significant and supportive relationships" available for knowing God and growing spiritually,[44] a description that exemplified the

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[39] In Springfield, Missouri. Downloaded October 11, 2006.
[40] In Pontiac, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[41] In Salem, OR. Downloaded October 31, 2006.
[42] In Phoenix, AZ. Downloaded November 10, 2006.
[43] In Omaha, NE. Downloaded November 2, 2006.
[44] In Vista, California. Downloaded November 1, 2006.

many opportunities for involvement typical of the megachurch sites. As I will show below, the emergent church sites had a unique approach to Christian history, which was visible in a statement on the website of Jacob's Well which expressed a desire to "explore three essential relationships together": "Our relationship to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," relationships with people, and "Our relationship to the past and to the future."[45] The use of "relationship" with reference to God and people on the Jacob's Well site was very similar to the use on the megachurch sites. All three of these kinds of churches stressed and enabled the formation of relationships. On the vibrant liberal/mainline church sites, the concept of community was connected to their commitment to inclusive welcome, and on the megachurch sites community and relationships helped people connect with God and with each other, and these relationship nurtured growth in faith. On the emergent church sites, community was intimately connected with their sense of who God is and who they are called to be. Thus, for the emergent churches, more so than for the other two kinds of churches, community, connectedness and relationships are at the core of the way they present the identity on their websites.

Welcoming Newcomers and Enabling Involvement

Continuing the theme of relationships, I now turn to consideration of the ways the congregational websites facilitated welcoming people into their community. All of the analyzed congregations have succeeded at welcoming newcomers and incorporating new people into the life of the congregation. The evidence for this assertion comes from the sheer size of the megachurches, the recognized vibrancy of the liberal/mainline congregations, and the exemplary status accorded to the emergent churches by the emergent network or by each other. All 60 of these congregations, in one form or another on their websites, expressed a welcome to new people and encouraged engagement with the congregation. Eight variables are considered in this section (see Table 4.3) that revealed differences in the patterns of welcoming new

[45] In Kansas City, MO. Downloaded October 13, 2006.

people. Next, an additional five variables will be considered that showed differences in the way new people were invited to engage in congregational activities.

Table 4.3. Welcoming Newcomers

Percent websites with element	Megachurches (n=20)	Vibrant liberal/mainline (n=20)	Emergent (n=20)	Significance (*p=*)
Use of "welcome" on homepage	45%	85%	75%	.017*
Mission statement on homepage	40%	90%	65%	.003*
Use of "inclusive" or "inclusion" on homepage or other pages	0%	55%	5%	.000**
Link on homepage to information for newcomers	60%	10%	20%	.001*
Link on homepage to questions people might have (e.g., FAQs)	35%	0%	25%	.016*
Use of "relevant" on homepage or other pages	45%	10%	30%	.048*
Use of "seeker" or "searching" on homepage or other pages	0%	10%	40%	.001*

The vibrant liberal/mainline congregations were more likely to use the word "welcome" on their homepages, to have a mission statement on their homepage, and to use the word "inclusive" or "inclusion" or to mention that they were not exclusive. Consider this example:

> First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York extends a simple and unqualified welcome, in Christ's name, to all who seek to join us. We affirm that there can be no exclusiveness within the body of Christ and therefore invite

> all children of God into full membership, encouraging the full participation of all members in every area of the life of this congregation.[46]

The same type of language appeared on the homepage of University Lutheran Church of the Incarnation in Philadelphia:

> We are an inclusive community, sharing Christ on campus and in the city. Welcome! That is our mission statement, which expresses the ideals we try to achieve: "inclusive community"; "sharing Christ"; "campus and city"; "welcome."[47]

Welcome was expressed verbally, and verbal information about the congregation's mission was given front and center on the homepage. As was shown earlier in the discussion of the word "community," the linking of "inclusive" with "community" was a key concept for these congregations.

In contrast, the welcome expressed by megachurches came in a different form. Less than half of the megachurches used the word "welcome" on their homepages, but 60% of megachurches had links on their homepages specifically for visitors or newcomers (see Table 4.3). Within this variable, four of these megachurches had a link using the word "new," with varied punctuation: "New to Salem Alliance?" "New? to Bayside" [sic], "New to Westover," and "New to James River?"[48] In the case of James River, the words appear on a graphic shaped like a luggage tag, and the graphic was the link to the information for newcomers. The use of the word "new" seems likely to enable newcomers to find the information they need very easily. Four other megachurch sites illustrated the variety of links for newcomers. First Orlando had a statement on its website, "New to First Orlando," followed by five links to a welcome message, worship times, directions and campus map, questions about membership, and a statement about the congregation. Calvary Chapel Downey had "visitors" as one of eight choices on its navigation bar, and North Coast Church had "visitor info" as one of 11 choices on its navigation bar. North Point Ministries had a gateway web page that gave viewers four choices of websites to enter. One of the four was labeled "Before

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[46] Downloaded October 24, 2006.
[47] Downloaded October 25, 3006.
[48] All quotations from megachurch websites in this paragraph were downloaded November 1, 2006.

you attend." Only two of the vibrant liberal/mainline sites and five of the emergent sites had similar links. These links for newcomers and visitors typically took the viewer to web pages that gave basic information such as the times of worship and directions to the church. Additional information for newcomers appeared to be designed to soothe fears about coming, including statements saying that casual attire was welcome, children and youth programs were designed to meet families' needs, questions were welcomed, and people in any place in life were welcome. Seven of the megachurch sites had links on the homepage to questions people might have, often in the form of frequently asked questions. The FAQs often included information for newcomers such as an emphasis on casual clothing, programs for children and youth, and the kinds of things a person can expect from a worship service. In addition, in some cases the FAQs addressed theological questions about the congregation's beliefs. Only five emergent sites had links to questions, and no vibrant liberal/mainline sites had such links.

Megachurches also used the word "relevant" the most frequently on their websites, a word that makes a positive connection between people's everyday lives and the life of the congregation. Therefore, "relevant" implied welcome for newcomers and visitors. On nine megachurch sites, the word was applied to several different components of congregational life and Christian faith. At Salem Alliance, it was applied to the worship services: "We're relevant. Contemporary services with joy, humor and relevance to everyday life."[49] At Christ the Rock, it was applied to expressions of faith: "We desire to be a loving, accepting family of believers who celebrate and demonstrate the life of Christ through relevant and creative expressions of faith."[50] Several times on the megachurch sites, the word "relevant" was applied to the sermons or the teaching. For example, Bayside said, "Weekend services feature messages . . . that are biblically-based, relevant, and life-application oriented."[51] A second example is Branch Creek, which said, "The goal of our teachings is to

[49] In Salem, OR. Downloaded October 31, 2006.
[50] In Menasha, WI. Downloaded November 8, 2006.
[51] In Granite Bay, CA. Downloaded November 10, 2006.

transform lives by the inspiring and relevant teachings of the Bible."[52] Six of the emergent congregations used "relevant," applying it to faith in Christ, the congregation itself, and the teachings of the Bible. The issue of cultural relevance appeared on two emergent websites: The Bridge website said in a list of nine core values, "Relevance to our culture is not optional,"[53] and the Wounded Healer Fellowship website echoed, "We seek to be a life-giving place where people of multi-cultural backgrounds can connect with the teachings of Jesus in a natural and culturally relevant way."[54] In the two uses on the vibrant liberal/mainline websites, one referred to preaching and the other referred to a class about the teachings of Jesus for our time. The similarities in the use of "relevant" between the three kinds of churches are worthy of note: the teachings of the Bible and preaching were referenced as being relevant in all three kinds of churches, even though the megachurches and emergent churches are usually considered to be evangelical and the mainline churches in this study are liberal. The emergent church emphasis on cultural relevance, found on two websites, shows that the emergent churches may be more likely to seek engagement with our multi-cultural society.

Both the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations and the megachurches seem to be strategic in their offer of welcome on their websites for newcomers and visitors. The vibrant liberal/mainline churches used words to describe their inclusive welcome, and the megachurches used links to helpful information for newcomers and the word "relevant" to encourage visitors and newcomers to believe that the life of the congregation and its teaching would be relevant to their needs. Because the emergent churches have lower numbers in both of these areas, it might appear that their websites are less welcoming of newcomers and visitors. However, much of their welcome lay in their description of community and their invitation for people to join into that community, explored earlier. In addition, they were more likely to use the words "seeker" or to describe people who are searching, and this constituted a part of their form of welcome. While several of the megachurch websites talked about welcoming

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[52] In Harleysville, PA. Downloaded November 15, 2006.
[53] In Pontiac, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[54] In Pembroke Pines, FL. Downloaded October 13, 2006.

people who have questions and providing answers to those questions, the emergent church websites tended more towards embracing searching as a part of the life of faith. Jacob's Well emphasized that seekers would find a place in God's kingdom rather than answers to all their questions: "Jacob's Well is striving to be a place – like the biblical Jacob's Well – where people who are searching can encounter God and find a place in his kingdom and community and join him in his work in the world."[55] Vineyard Central affirmed that all Christians are still seekers in some way: "In some mysterious way, all of us are seekers, saints, and sinners – though perhaps in varying degrees. No matter what mixture of seeker, saint, and sinner you are you're welcome here."[56] The Bridge said that its mission is "to develop spiritual friendships with seekers and skeptics and be transformed together into relevant, loving, devoted followers of Jesus Christ."[57] These quotations indicate the invitation by emergent churches to seekers and searchers, encouraging them to enter into community so everyone can be transformed together.

A component of welcoming new people is to make it easy for them to get involved. Megachurches have a steady stream of newcomers who must be enfolded in some way into the congregation, and their websites reflected that reality (see Table 4.4). Megachurch websites had more links on their homepage to opportunities for engagement in small groups. Various reasons for the important of small groups were given. For example, Bayside Covenant Church emphasized that Christian growth, life-change, and pastoral care happen best in small groups,[58] Salem Alliance referred to small groups as a place to be "noticed, known and nurtured,"[59] and King of Kings Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) said, "Small groups are an awesome way to get connected to other Christians in fellowship, Bible study and spiritual growth."[60] Some

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[55] In Kansas City, MO. Downloaded October 13, 2006.
[56] In Norwood, Ohio. Downloaded October 13, 2006.
[57] In Pontiac, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[58] In Granite Bay, CA. Downloaded November 10, 2006.
[59] In Salem, Oregon. Downloaded October 31, 2006.
[60] In Omaha, NE. Downloaded November 2, 2006.

congregations used different names for small groups: shepherding groups,[61] Life groups (to "experience life-giving community")[62] and LIFE groups ("Learning, Involving, Fellowshipping, Evangelizing"),[63] perhaps indicating a desire to help people think in a new way about small groups or to reframe the purpose of small groups. Two congregations spelled out that they did not offer adult Sunday School classes because they wished to focus their adult Christian education program on small groups, [64] which indicates the priority they place on small groups. Even though these two congregations did not offer adult education classes, which effectively reduced the megachurch sample to 18 for this question, megachurches were still more likely to have links on their homepage to classes for adults. Classes are one more way for people to engage with the life of the congregation. The classes offered by megachurches covered topics related to the Bible and many practical issues, such as Christian principles of money management, discovering one's spiritual gifts, marriage enrichment, and parenting.

[61] Salem Alliance, Salem, Oregon. Downloaded October 31, 2006.
[62] Fair Haven Ministries, Hudsonville, MI. Downloaded November 3, 2006.
[63] First Baptist Church Orlando, FL. Downloaded November 9, 2006.
[64]North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, GA, on November 8, 2006 and North Coast Church, Vista, CA, on November 1, 2006.

Table 4.4. Encouraging Engagement

Percent websites with element	Megachurches (n=20)	Vibrant liberal/mainline (n=20)	Emergent (n=20)	Significance (*p=*)
Link on homepage to small groups	85%	25%	55%	.000**
Link on homepage to educational opportunities	65%	50%	25%	.037*
Link on homepage to service opportunities	80%	50%	45%	0.052
Use of "grow" or "growth" on homepage	30%	30%	0%	.022*
Mean on homepage				
Imperative verbs	9.7	4.3	6.5	.009*

Later analysis will show that vibrant liberal/mainline and emergent churches talked more often on their websites about justice and servicing the poor, nonetheless, the megachurches offered more links on the homepages of their websites to opportunities for involvement in service. The viewer who clicked on one of these links could access a wide variety of ways to be involved, including helping with the congregation's programs (e.g., children and youth ministries, audio assistance, website maintenance, and aid to congregation members), helping with the congregation's ministries to the local community, and participating in mission trips to help with projects such as Hurricane Katrina relief or overseas mission trips. The three kinds of links found frequently on the megachurch websites – to small groups, educational opportunities, and service opportunities – provided options for involvement that met the needs and desires of a variety of people. In a related finding, the megachurches, along with the vibrant liberal/mainline churches, used the words "grow" or "growth"

more frequently on their websites than the emergent churches did. These words were always used positively, indicating that spiritual growth was a goal or desire of the congregation. In the therapeutic climate of our culture, the desire for spiritual growth seems to be a significant reason why people attend a church, and the megachurches were strategic in offering links to specific opportunities to help that growth happen.

The megachurches were also much more likely to use imperative verbs on their websites (see Table 4.4, bottom half). Some of these verbs were on links and menus, corresponding to the increased number of links found on the megachurch sites: "contact us," "click here for more information," "click here to log in," "download the newest bulletin," "listen online" "connect with opportunities for . . ." and "discover. . . ." These imperative verbs were practical and instructional, yet they also exercised persuasion by encouraging the viewer to engage further with the website. Many of the imperative verbs on megachurch sites were not related to links and exercised persuasion by encouraging engagement with the congregation and its ministries. Some examples are: "Come and celebrate changed lives with us," the Vineyard North Phoenix website invited.[65] "Experience the Heart of the King," encouraged King of Kings Church. "Serve your community . . . Join us as we move into our community to share the love of Jesus in practical ways" (ellipsis in original), North Coast Church invited. "Join us and experience the Joy for the Journey," Mount Corinth Missionary Baptist Church encouraged. The Vineyard North Phoenix homepage had a slideshow with four photos, each with a large imperative verb in a cursive script: Exalt, Evangelize, Encourage, Equip. All of these imperative verbs encourage action and exercise persuasion, which parallel the other data that show the variety of ways the megachurch websites appear to excel in enabling people to get involved. The vibrant liberal/mainline and emergent churches used imperative verbs in similar ways, but in significantly smaller numbers. "Join us in our love of Christ and one another!" invited the First Congregational Church UCC Columbus, a vibrant

[65] All quotations from megachurch websites in this paragraph were downloaded November 1, 2006.

liberal/mainline congregation .[66] Of the 60 congregations studied, only two had no imperative verbs on their homepages – both of them emergent. Advertisements use a high number of imperative verbs (Cook, 2001), partly because imperative verbs create a feeling of informality and familiarity. They are one form of synthetic personalization, used so commonly in advertisements, that gives the impression that the viewer is being treated as an individual, with individually tailored personal options (Fairclough, 1989; Cameron, 2000; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). Thus the high number of imperative verbs on the megachurch websites indicates their embrace of the advertising genre and their strong commitment to encouraging engagement with the congregation in every possible way.

The Visual and the Arts

The patterns shown above related to verbal information and invitation were reinforced by many of the findings regarding visual resources on the websites (see Table 4.5). The megachurch websites had more photos than the other churches, as shown above. They also had many more photos of people as well. Notably, though, while more people in photos on the megachurch websites were looking directly into the camera (called "demand gaze" by Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1999), the difference between the number of photos with direct address on the three kinds of websites was not close to statistically significant. Within this variable, however, a difference could be observed in the way each type of church used photos with direct address on their homepages. Two of the vibrant liberal/mainline congregation homepages had a photo which looked to be the whole congregation: in one case about 70 people and in another case about 100 people.[67] Almost all of the people in these very large groups were looking into the camera. None of the other websites observed for this study had photos with such large groups of people looking into the camera, although many of the megachurches showed photos of the congregation in worship services, looking away

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[66] In Columbus, OH. On November 9, 2006.

[67] Church of the Holy Innocents, San Francisco, CA and Wallingford United Methodist Church, Seattle, WA, observed November 1, 2006.

from the camera. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, these photos with large numbers of people can communicate social distance. More megachurch websites used headshots, a result that was close to being statistically significant. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that the amount of a person's body captured in a photograph can imply the social distance between the viewer and the person viewed in the photo. The more of a person's body we see in the photograph, the greater the social distance implied. Therefore the headshots on the megachurch websites played a part in the communication of intimacy in these very large churches.

Table 4.5. Kinds of Photos and Graphics

Mean on homepage	Megachurches (n=20)	Vibrant liberal/mainline (n=20)	Emergent (n=20)	Significance *(p=)*
Number of photos of people	5.6	1.7	3.0	.032*
Number of people in photos with demand gaze (people looking into camera)	6.2	5.3	3.2	.566
Percent websites with element on homepage				
Use of headshots	60%	35%	25%	.067
Use of nature photos	45%	10%	15%	.017*
Use of photos of buildings	50%	75%	15%	.000**
Use of denominational graphic	10%	45%	5%	.002*

Further, other interesting differences in the use of photographs and graphics across congregations emerged. Megachurches were significantly more likely to use nature photos (see Table 4.5), possibly to communicate peace and serenity, while the vibrant liberal/mainline churches were significantly more likely to use photos of buildings. When emergent church and megachurch websites use photos of buildings on their homepage, they were sometimes photos of the church building and sometimes

photos of buildings in the city where the church is located. When vibrant liberal/mainline churches use photos of buildings, in almost every case they were photos of the church building, indicating that these congregations base more of their identity in their building than the other two kinds of churches. In addition, vibrant liberal/mainline churches were more likely to use graphics associated with their denomination, which parallels their use of links to their denomination. Only a handful of the 20 emergent churches in this study were associated with a denomination, so it is not surprising that only one of them used a denominational graphic. However, 16 of the 20 megachurches were associated with a denomination or group of churches, yet only 10% of them used a denominational graphic. This reinforces the sense of self-sufficiency portrayed on the megachurch sites, an aspect of their identity shown earlier, while the vibrant liberal/mainline churches identities were more closely connected to their denominations.

Emergent churches are known for their embrace of the arts (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005), so it was surprising that the emergent church websites examined for this study had only slightly fewer links to the arts than the other churches (see Table 4.6). The vibrant liberal/mainline congregations had more links to music than either the emergent congregations or the megachurches. Despite the fact that neither of these patterns was statistically significant, differences could be noted in the way the three kinds of congregations talked about the arts on their websites. Only one of the megachurches, Fair Haven Ministries, a Reformed Church in America megachurch, mentioned the arts on the pages that refer to the congregation's philosophy and mission. Fair Haven had a Celebration Arts Department which "seeks to utilize God's gifts of music, drama, and dance in ways that glorify His Name, first and foremost. We strive to lead and edify the worshipers through these forms to enhance their worship experience and draw them closer to our Lord as they offer their individual praises to Him."[68] Two aspects of this statement are worthy of note. First is the instrumental nature of the use of the arts in support of worship. Worship is only one part of congregational life, and both the

[68] In Hudsonville, Michigan. Downloaded November 3, 2006.

emergent and vibrant liberal/mainline church websites discuss the arts as a part of the whole life of the congregation, not limited to supporting another congregational activity. Secondly, since the Reformation, Protestant churches have privileged music and verbally based arts above the visual arts (Brown, 2005; Dyrness, 2004), and that emphasis is visible in Fair Haven Ministries' emphasis on music, drama and dance, all of which have verbal or musical components. The arts, at Fair Haven, are portrayed as supporting worship, and they stand in the long Protestant tradition of valuing the arts linked to words and music.

Table 4.6. The Arts

Number of websites with element	Megachurches (n=20)	Vibrant liberal/mainline (n=20)	Emergent (n=20)	Significance (*p=*)
Link to arts	10%	15%	20%	.678
Link to music	15%	45%	25%	.103
Arts mentioned as part of congregational vision or mission[69]	5%	10%	60%	.001*

Two of the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations talked about the arts in the context of their vision or mission. St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City mentioned supporting the arts on its homepage, and the arts were also mentioned twice on the web page that described the congregation's mission. One statement put the arts in the framework of dialog with the city: "Through ongoing conversation with God, one another, and a variety of partners in the business, arts, and religious communities, we seek to creatively shape life in the city even as our lives are being shaped by the

[69] This variable was not a part of the original content analysis. Table 3.2 described the verbal text downloaded from the sites, and after the content analysis was concluded, I searched that text for frequency of discussion of the arts.

Good News of Jesus Christ risen among us."[70] Pasadena Presbyterian Church listed eight aspects of its vision, one of which was "to celebrate the creative arts."[71] In another place, its website stated, "By nurturing the mind and spirit, celebrating the creative arts and engaging in local and global mission, we proclaim hope." Fair Haven Ministries, a megachurch, engaged with the arts to enable worship, while Saint Peter's saw the arts community as a partner in shaping life in the city, and Pasadena Presbyterian Church saw the arts as a way of proclaiming hope.

Twelve of the 20 emergent churches talked about the arts as a part of their vision or mission. Two of them echoed Fair Haven's emphasis on the arts as a way to enable people to worship, and one of them, like Saint Peter's, mentioned the local art community as a place where the congregation desired connection. One emergent congregation met in an arts center, and the events in that arts center were sometimes described on the congregation's website.[72] Two congregations mentioned hosting displays by local visual artists. Several emergent church websites described the arts as an integral part of being a Christian: "Vintage Faith has the arts and creativity in our blood . . . Creativity and the arts won't be something the church does, but something ingrained in who we are." The arts were "profoundly important,"[73] "an essential part of learning, communicating, and understanding,"[74] and "a core means of spiritual expression."[75] This came from a view of God as "an artistic God,"[76] an attribute of God mentioned on three websites. Mission Gathering described it this way:

> God is beautiful and His creation reflects His beauty. God is the ultimate artist. God's beauty can be found in nature. God also created people in His image and likeness as works of beauty. So we are also all creators. When we experience beauty and creativity we connect with God. Missiongathering tries to experience beauty through music, images, art, films, candles, and multi-sensory

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[70] St. Peter's Lutheran Church, New York City, NY. Downloaded October 19, 2006.
[71] In Pasadena, CA. Downloaded November 9, 2006.
[72] Providence Community Church, Plano, TX.
[73] Vineyard Central, Norwood, OH. Downloaded October 13, 2006.
[74] The Bridge, Pontiac, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[75] Church of the Apostles, Seattle, WA. Downloaded November 8, 2006.
[76] Mosaic, Austin, TX. Downloaded October 14, 2006.

> experiences. We value many different forms of creative expression and use a variety of media to convey God's love.[77]

For the emergent churches, the arts were a part of the voice of the congregation reflecting back to God something about God's own nature, a key component of Christian spirituality.

Other Values

Some other notable differences emerged (see Table 4.7). Almost half of the vibrant liberal/mainline churches used "justice" on their homepages or on pages that express their mission. Lyndale United Church of Christ in Minneapolis had a brief mission statement: "A Spirited, Justice-seeking Community."[78] The mission statement of First Congregregational UCC in Washington, D.C. also used the word:

> Deepening faith and community,
> Living progressive Christian spirituality,
> Embodying and extending God's welcome, healing, justice and love.[79]

Two other vibrant liberal/mainline congregations gave longer descriptions of their identity and purpose, which brought together many of the themes of this chapter:

> Central Presbyterian Church is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ who come together in central Atlanta to worship, serve, and be nurtured by God. We come as to a well spring, bringing our thirst and emptiness, only to discover that our cup is filled by the living Word, Who sends us to be with those in need and to call forth God's justice in a chaotic world.[80]

At Central Presbyterian, justice is embedded in a discussion of community, service, and congregational life, as it is at Ebenezer Lutheran:

> Ebenezer Lutheran Church has been called together as a community by the Holy Spirit to worship God through the Word and Sacraments and to educate people in following the example of Jesus Christ. This community is committed to mutual support, growth and encouragement for Christ-like service to the

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[77] In San Diego, CA. Downloaded October 14, 2006.
[78] Downloaded October 21, 2006.
[79] Downloaded October 21, 2006.
[80] Downloaded October 26, 2006.

> parish and for the advocacy of justice for all oppressed, marginalized, and disenfranchised people.[81]

Justice was central to the forms of service that these congregations valued, supported financially, and engaged in. Justice as a value was closely connected to the liberal/mainline emphasis on inclusion. The liberal/mainline churches were also more likely to use "Jesus" or "Christ" on their homepages. Their desire to extend an inclusive welcome and their commitment to justice were often described as coming from the priorities of Jesus Christ.

Table 4.7. Other Values and Beliefs.

Percent websites with element	Megachurches (n=20)	Vibrant liberal/mainline (n=20)	Emergent (n=20)	Significance (*p=*)
Use of "justice" on homepage or other pages	0%	45%	15%	.001*
Use of "Jesus" on homepage	30%	75%	60%	.013*
Reference to serving the poor on other pages	5%	15%	35%	.044*
Reference to historic Christianity on homepage or other pages	5%	20%	60%	.000**
Reference to openness to questions on homepage or other pages	0%	0%	40%	.000**
Use of "authentic" on homepage or other pages	30%	5%	60%	.001*
Link to statement of beliefs	50%	15%	35%	.063

[81] In Chicago, IL. Downloaded November 11, 2006.

A striking feature of the megachurch websites was that none of them mentioned justice on their homepage or on pages that addressed the mission and purpose of the congregation. Given the megachurch emphasis on the authority of the Bible and the Bible's frequent mention of justice, this omission raises questions. The popular press has noted a seemingly frequent alliance between megachurches and the Republican Party, which seldom uses the word "justice," as well as a propensity for megachurches to draw on consumerist models rather than affirm the Christian value of justice (*PR Newswire*, 2007; Samad, 2006). The megachurches also had the least frequent use of "Jesus" on their homepages. Taken together, the absence of "justice" and the relatively few uses of "Jesus" may reflect a greater consciousness on the part of megachurches that they are trying to attract people in a secular society to come to church. These characteristics could reflect a greater cultural sensitivity, and, at the same time, they could be signs of the way these congregations have embraced cultural values of consumerism or conservative politics.

Three of the emergent churches mentioned justice on their homepages or other pages. Extended Grace Faith Community was one example: "We are passionately justice-oriented, complementing our acts of discussion and worship with a commitment to radical servanthood in [God's] world."[82] This concern for justice was complemented by the frequency with which emergent churches talked about serving the poor. They were also more likely to make a reference to historic Christianity on their websites. Concern for the poor and an interest in the ancient church have been documented as characteristics of emergent churches (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005), and they are related. Serving the poor can be viewed as an historic Christian spiritual discipline (Jones, 2005). Providence Community Church said it desired to serve the poor because of Jesus' command: "Being convicted by the fact that we should not simply talk about Jesus, but follow Jesus, we take seriously Christ's command to minister to the poor and oppressed."[83] The Gathering said, "We, as a church, believe that since God created

[82] In Muskegon, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[83] In Plano, TX. Downloaded October 12, 2006.

humanity with all of our differences, then the church should reflect those differences. We embrace the poor, the rich, the homeless, the widowed, the orphan."[84] Several of the emergent church websites expressed solidarity with the poor and a desire to be in relationship with them, not simply serve them from a distance. One example is the Vineyard Central's website which talked about serving the poor of Norwood, Ohio, by living among them and building bridges.[85] All of these descriptions of service to the poor and connection with the poor give a unique flavor to the emergent church websites. The vibrant liberal/mainline churches talked about justice and inclusion, but less about the poor. The megachurch websites provided opportunities to serve the poor, but did not give a theological framework for those opportunities.

A discussion of history was found much more frequently on emergent church websites than on the other two kinds of church sites, and it took several forms. Several sites talked about wanting to rediscover the priorities of the apostles as expressed in the New Testament, and this exploration contributed to the emergent church commitment to community. The website of The Bridge, in Pontiac, Michigan, said, "From studying the life and writings of the first-century church we've found a group of people who are very committed to one thing: community." The phrases "ancient and modern" and "ancient-future" appeared on several websites, along with text that described congregations' commitment to be relevant in the present and future while drawing on ancient traditions. St. Paul's Collegiate Church at Storrs explained this priority more fully: "SPCC is Ancient-Future in that it recognizes that the appropriate response to post-modernism is not a return to modernism but a rediscovery of the ancient Christian faith, including forms of prayer, meditation, worship, and spiritual formation."[86] Three of the vibrant liberal/mainline congregational sites expressed this same commitment to allow their congregational life to reflect something of the priorities of the early church. This emphasis on Christian history is likely a manifestation of the postmodernist desire to move away from modernism, with its focus so firmly on the present (Grenz, 1996).

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[84] In Amarillo, Texas. Downloaded November 8, 2006.
[85] October 13, 2006.
[86] In Storrs Mansfield, Connecticut. Downloaded November 9. 2006.

In a continuation of the way the emergent church websites revealed a perspective that contrasted with the other two types of churches, the emergent churches talked about the role of questions in the life of faith differently. The megachurches mentioned questions quite often, with their links to frequently asked questions and their willingness to provide Christian answers to the questions that people bring to congregational life. The vibrant liberal/mainline congregations didn't talk about questions very often on their sites; they addressed similar issues when they stressed freedom of conscience, embrace of diverse viewpoints, and a view of the Christian life as a journey involving struggles and challenges. Eight of the emergent church sites affirmed that questions are a part of the life of faith in some form. This variable looked for statements that affirmed doubt or questions as an unavoidable and even welcome part of the journey of faith. "We are unafraid of acknowledging that both faith and doubt are part of our spiritual journey, our lifelong walk with God,"[87] the website of Extended Grace Faith Community said. This congregation went on to assert that they "find more grace in the search for understanding than we do in dogmatic certainty – more value in questioning than in absolutes." In contrast with the megachurch websites, several of which affirmed that they delight in providing answers for people who have spiritual questions, the website of Wounded Healer Fellowship said:

> We, like you, have dreamed of being part of a spiritual community where faith and questions could coincide. Where discussions that don't neatly resolve at the end of the forum are ok. We dreamed of a place where our most honest questions are not dismissed, but openly discussed. We promise that we will be real.[88]

In a related comment, the website of Three Nails affirmed that, "We value the freedom to fail as we step out together in new roles as disciples and leaders . . . not fearing the 'new mistakes' we will make along the way."[89]

This embrace of questions and doubt as a part of the life of faith, and the willingness to make mistakes, was closely related to the concept of authenticity, which

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[87] In Muskegon, Michigan. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[88] In Pembroke Pines, FL. Downloaded October 13, 2006.
[89] In Pittsburgh, PA. Downloaded November 15, 2006.

appeared most frequently on the emergent church websites as a positive value, often connected to other values already discussed. Highway Church had four words across the top of its website: "Truth. Authenticity. Community. Hope."[90] Authenticity was one of three core values in one congregation (along with "Christ-centered" and "Missional") and one of seven core values in another congregation.[91] Authenticity was often connected to the worship experience. In discussing small groups, the Mosaic website affirmed that "Community provides the context for authentic worship."[92] The Bridge issued an invitation to Sunday worship that provided the option to participate or not: "Join in (if you want) with the band and people around you as we worship God with passion and authenticity."[93] Authenticity was defined vividly by The Gathering: "We as a church are called to be real. We strive to be WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get)."[94] Jacob's Well furthered that definition: "We are also authentic. We believe that God is honored and lives are transformed when people are honest, genuine, and real, exposing their brokenness to God and to others. We try not to wear masks."[95] An emphasis on authenticity on the part of emergent churches seems closely connected to their conception of community, relationships, growth in faith, and the need to offer options as a congregation.

The megachurch sites also used the words "authentic" and "authenticity" with some frequency. Three megachurches used these words in their statement of values, one describing worship as authentic and one describing Biblical community as authentic.[96] Salem Alliance's definition of authenticity expressed the subtle but profound way the megachurches portrayed themselves differently than the emergent churches: "Openly admitting our sinfulness and brokenness in accountable

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[90] In Mountain View, CA. Downloaded October 14, 2006.
[91] Providence Community Church, Plano, TX, downloaded October 12, 2006 and The Gathering, Amarillo, TX, downloaded November 8, 2006.
[92] In Austin, TX. October 14, 2006.
[93] In Pontiac, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.
[94] In Amarillo, TX. Downloaded November 8, 2006.
[95] In Kansas City, MO. Downloaded October 13, 2006.
[96] King of Kings Lutheran (Missouri Synod), Omaha, NE, downloaded November 2, 2006, and First Baptist Orlando, downloaded November 9, 2006.

relationships, while reaching for wholeness and righteousness through Christ."[97] Sinfulness and brokenness, in the form of doubt and questioning, were viewed on the emergent church websites as a part of the journey of faith (e.g., "both faith and doubt are part of our spiritual journey" on the Extended Grace website[98]). However, on the megachurch websites brokenness and doubt were viewed as something to be admitted only in the context of trying to fix them through faith in Christ ("while reaching for wholeness and righteousness through Christ"). This related to another characteristic of megachurch sites. More megachurches in this sample had a link on their homepage that led the viewer to a statement of belief than the other two types of churches do. These statements of belief usually took a form similar to the Apostle's or Nicene Creed, including words about God the Father as creator; a description of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; a statement that human beings are sinful and need a savior; and a statement about the authority or inerrancy of the Bible. This emphasis on megachurch websites on thinking about faith in the framework of a traditional statement of faith fits with the emphasis on sermons and teaching, and the willingness to provide definitive answers to questions, which will be illustrated more fully in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter, based on a content analysis of 60 websites, set out to give an overview of the way different congregation use website features – links and verbal and visual text – to present their identity and exercise persuasion on their websites. This portion of the study is descriptive, with the goal of sketching patterns of similarities and differences among 60 websites. For the megachurches, opportunities on their websites for engagement appear to be intimately connected with their identity. The megachurches enable and encourage engagement through many website choices. Their homepages use more photos, graphics, slideshows, videos, and links to audio, video and podcasts than the other two types of churches. They have many more internal

[97] In Salem, OR. Downloaded October 31, 2006.
[98] In Muskegon, MI. Downloaded October 12, 2006.

links. All of these features encourage engagement with the website itself and thus engagement with the ministries and values of the congregation. In fact, based on this analysis of their websites, it would be fair to say that megachurch websites convey a congregational identity that is rooted in being a place where people can connect with small groups, places to serve, classes and seminars where they can learn about the Christian faith and practical issues for everyday life, and can attend worship services that are relevant to everyday life. The number of links to congregational activities on megachurch websites, coupled with the imperative verbs and classes on practical subjects, indicate that people are welcomed into involvement and action, and encouraged to view the Christian faith as applicable in daily life; the websites, through their structure and words, facilitate that kind of engagement. The megachurch websites, because of the relative paucity of their outlinks, come across as more self-sufficient and perhaps more isolated than the other two types of churches.

Like the megachurches, the vibrant liberal/mainline church websites try to welcome people into involvement and action, and encourage people to view the Christian faith as applicable in daily life, but the structure and content of their websites indicate that other priorities hold a higher place for them. Based on their websites, vibrant liberal/mainline churches ground their identities, first and foremost, in their inclusive welcome and their apparent passion for justice, both of which are viewed as coming from the priorities of Jesus Christ. More than the other two types of churches, vibrant liberal/mainline church sites encourage connection with their denominations and community organizations, and they view their buildings and physical location in their communities as central to their identities. While they do encourage engagement with the congregation and its activities and ministries, their links and graphics indicate that they also see themselves as a part of the wider community of their denomination and their town or city.

Emergent church websites indicate the centrality of community, both face-to-face and online, in the identity of these congregations. Their desire for authentic expressions of Christian faith and their willingness to embrace questions and doubt as a

part of Christian faith speaks of an additional component of their identity; according to their websites, they don't want to "cover up" or "mask" real life struggles and challenges. Community for them is rooted in self-revealing honesty and in theological reflection on the nature of Christian community. They also present their sense of identity as grounded in their embrace of historical Christian spiritual disciplines; they mention Christian history more often than the other types of congregations. They see the arts as an integral part of the Christian faith and their own faith communities and as a significant way that God's presence is made known in the world – and again, their understanding of the arts is grounded in theological reflection. They talk about justice and serving the poor with some frequency. On nine website features (photos, graphics, links, etc.), the emergent churches ranked second after the megachurches, showing their embrace of web technology despite having smaller budgets than the megachurches.

The content analysis presented in this chapter has revealed clusters of characteristics corresponding with each of the kinds of churches. In some instances, those characteristics have been shown to be related to each other, and in other instances, the attributes have been described but not situated in a coherent, unified picture of the congregations. The next chapter will present interpretive analysis that looks at these three kinds of congregations in a more holistic way, giving a more unified understanding of each of the three kinds of churches. The analysis in the next chapter will build on many of the characteristics described in this chapter: the multitude of opportunities for engagement on the megachurch sites, the passion for justice and an inclusive welcome on the vibrant liberal/mainline sites, and the strong embrace of community, the arts, historic Christian spiritual disciplines, and service to the poor on the emergent church sites. These characteristics play a significant part in refining an understanding of who exactly these congregations present themselves to be and in a continuing look at the ways their sites exercise persuasion and encourage engagement.

As a first step in developing a comprehensive view of these three kinds of congregations, based on the evidence and analysis presented thus far, I argue that these congregational websites can be compared by visualizing them as different types of lenses. The megachurch websites function like a mirror, reflecting back to the viewer something they want to see in themselves: "You belong, you are worthy and will not be judged. In fact, you will look like the people in these pictures if you participate in the activities of this congregation." So, when the faces are looking into the camera, it is as if the viewer sees himself or herself through that gaze, and the viewer is invited to identify with the people pictured on the sites. In contrast, the vibrant liberal/mainline church websites function more like a window. Their words and photos assure the viewer that they are inclusive, saying in effect, "We know you must be feeling like an outsider, but take a look and you'll see you're welcome here. All of us feel like outsiders in one way or another, so we're all glad this congregation welcomes us." This window on inclusive community enables the viewer to see what this congregation is all about. In yet another contrast, the emergent churches seem to be giving the viewers their own camera, a set of lenses with choices that empower the viewer to produce an artistic object of their own. "Be creative," this camera says. "If you want to join us in making new and beautiful photos for God, we offer a space for you to do that." These lenses that I have identified with the three kinds of congregations – the mirror, the window and the camera – give a preliminary glimpse of the differences in philosophy, strategy and persuasion on the sites.[99] In the next chapter, these differences will become clearer.

[99] I am indebted to Satina Smith, who thought of these lenses, and described them to me in a personal conversation.

Chapter Five

Demand, Diversity, and Community: An Interpretive Analysis of Six Congregational Websites

"We cannot underestimate the power of words that shape our viewpoints and understanding of what a 'church' is, and how it is supposed to function." This statement from the website of the emergent church Vintage Faith[100] summarizes the purpose of this chapter: to continue to look at the power of discourse – both words and images – on six congregational websites that shapes our viewpoints and understanding of how each one portrays itself and functions as a church. This interpretive analysis, using rhetorical criticism, continues to present patterns in features and vocabulary that contribute to the conceptual framework of this study, interpreting the patterns in the ways the features and vocabulary are used on the sites. Brummett (1984) writes that one of the ultimate goals and justifications of rhetorical criticism is "to teach people how to experience their rhetorical environments more richly" (p. 103). Jasinski (2001b) adds that rhetorical criticism "reveals the way perspectives are crafted, circulated, and subverted" (p. 262). I examine the richness of the rhetorical environments of these websites and the way the perspectives are crafted – and sometimes subverted – using several rhetorical theories as lenses. In particular, I look at the websites in the light of two traditional rhetorical theories, audience and genre, and a less well-known third one, Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, and I also consider the way the sites engage with the concept of community. As is common in rhetorical analysis, I also draw from scholars in other disciplines; in this case work by Kress and van Leeuwen (1999) and Fairclough (2003) in critical discourse analysis. The goal of this chapter is to continue the analysis begun in chapter four by providing more unified, holistic and coherent pictures of the three kinds of congregations. These pictures will help to provide insight into the two research questions of this study: In what ways do congregations present

[100] Downloaded October 17, 2006.

their organizational identity on their websites? In what ways do congregations encourage and enable engagement on their websites? The congregational websites were observed intensely over a three month period from mid-June to mid-September 2006, and then less frequently for seven weeks from mid-October to early December 2006.[101]

Megachurch Websites: Sophisticated and Strategic

Congregational websites are usually created with two audiences in mind: people who already attend the church and people who are looking for a church. These two audiences were made explicit in the strategy of Saddleback Community Church, in Orange County, California, one of the largest and best known megachurches. Saddleback had two websites, one for each audience. A Google search using the church's name produced, first of all, the site www.saddleback.com (hereafter called "Saddleback's visitor site"), which addressed questions and issues of people looking for a church or planning to visit Saddleback. Several items later in the list of Google search results was the church's second site, www.saddlebackfamily.com (hereafter called "Saddleback's member site").[102] Saddleback's two sites represent the two major audiences for congregational websites. In nine of the ten interviews conducted for this study, the website producers talked about these two audiences for their congregational websites. Most of them talked about the choices they made of features and verbal text to appeal to both audiences. Saddleback made explicit this dual focus by using two separate websites.

The homepage of Saddleback's visitor site was simpler than its member site homepage, with more white space, fewer links, fewer graphics, giving it a more serene and peaceful look. (See Figure 5.1.) A slideshow with four locations for photos showed a total of 18 photos, four of them nature photos, one of them a photo of part of the church building, and the rest photos of people posed informally. The nature photos,

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[101] The six congregations studied are: megachurches Willow Creek Community Church and Saddleback Community Church, vibrant liberal/mainline churches Seattle First Baptist and St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, and emergent churches Cedar Creek Community Church and Solomon's Porch. Their addresses and URLs are listed in Appendix A.

[102] Google search conducted October 26, 2006.

which included flowers, tropical fish, and a pool of water, invoked peace and serenity. About half of the photos of people appeared to be stereotypical families, including a family of four, a group of nine adults and children that appeared to be two families, and a man and woman with their arms around each other. In the photos of families, all the people were gazing directly into the camera, while in the other informal groupings of people who might be friends or acquaintances, about half were looking at the camera. To the left of the slideshow was a three-sentence statement of welcome, followed by a statement set off from the paragraph: "Remember: You Matter to God." Below the statement of welcome was a list of seven links written in the forms of questions or statements, such as, "What should I expect when I visit?" and "Saddleback cares: How can we help you?" The page also featured worship times and the church's address with a link to a map, as well as links to video of worship services, audio of music, and the congregation's newsletter. In the months I observed the site, the homepage of this site for visitors didn't change at all.

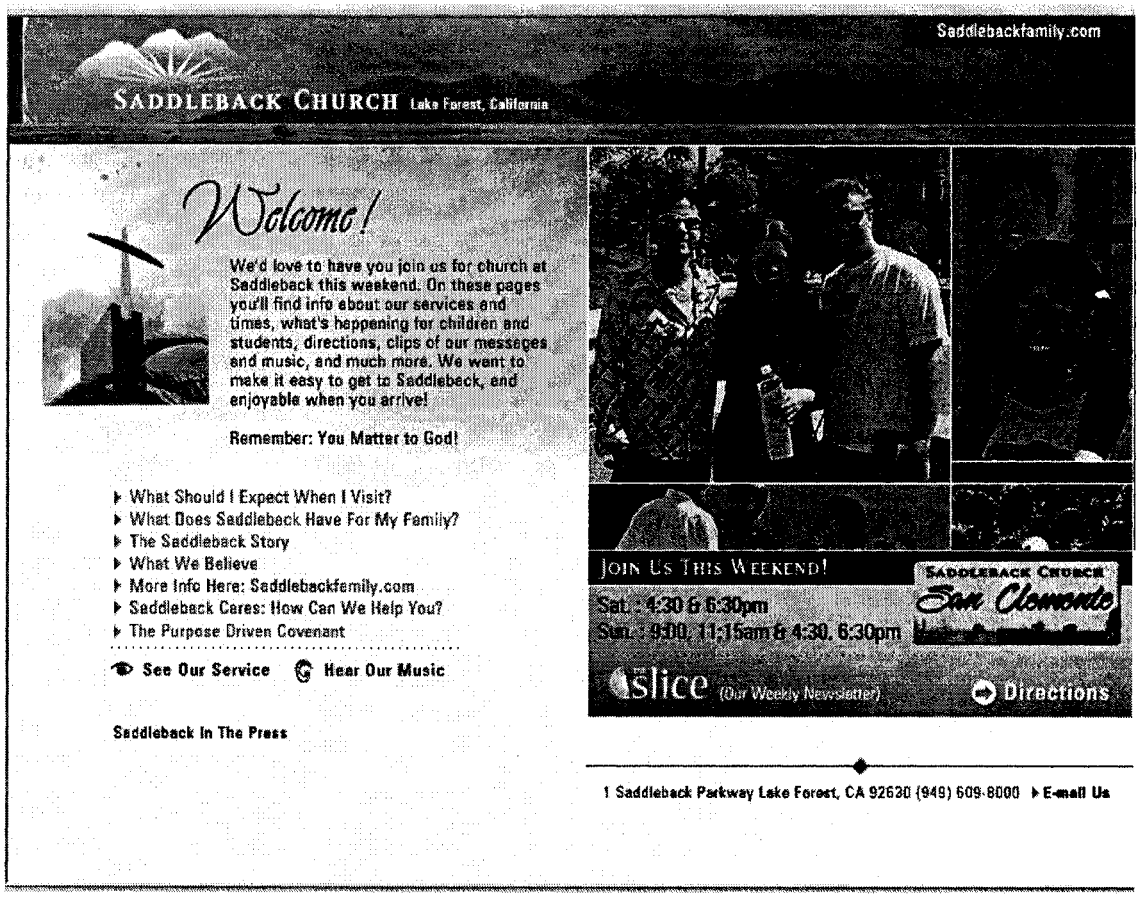

Figure 5.1. Saddleback Community Church, homepage for visitors. The four photos of people and a cactus plant were part of a slideshow with a total of 18 photos of people and flowers, tropical fish, and water (www.saddleback.org, downloaded January 20, 2007).

In the upper right of the visitor homepage was a link to Saddleback's member site, and the member site was referenced and linked on several of the pages of the visitor site. The homepage of the member site had a more cluttered look than the visitor site homepage, as if members needed to be aware of more options for involvement and needed to receive more information than new visitors do. (See Figure 5.2.) The member site updated frequently with changes in text, announcements of upcoming events, and new graphical links. Some aspects stayed the same over the months I examined the site: the links to age-related ministries for children, youth, and young

adults; a graphical representation of the congregation's five purposes that is also a link; a graphical link to small groups; and information on basic introductory classes for adults. The second megachurch, Willow Creek, in a suburb of Chicago, combines information for regular attenders with information for newcomers on one website and is explicit in its information for potential visitors and newcomers. On the homepage, a question mark graphical link is accompanied by the statement "New to Willow? Look here."[103] (See Figure 5.3.) Some of the other pages on the website have a box labeled "New to Willow Creek?" with six links, four of them in the form of questions. (See Figure 5.4). Willow Creek's link for newcomers on the homepage is typical of many megachurches, as shown in the previous chapter, but the presence of links for newcomers on other pages of the website is unusual and may be one of many factors that has contributed to Willow Creek's phenomenal growth. Links for newcomers, spread all over the website, give newcomers multiple opportunities to get basic information about the congregation.

[103] All quotations and observations in this paragraph were downloaded/noted on October 26, 2006.

Figure 5.2. Saddleback Community Church, homepage for members. This page had three slideshows: in the upper right where 5 photos of different small groups rotated, in the upper middle where "Drive Time" was shown, and at the bottom where "Pastor Rick in the Media" was shown (www.saddlebackfamily.org, downloaded January 20, 2007).

Figure 5.3. Willow Creek Community Church, homepage. In the upper left, the circular photo of a woman was part of a slideshow with more than 20 individuals pictured. In the upper right, the box with "student impact" was part of a slideshow of events, and a third slideshow was located under "News at Willow" (www.willowcreek.org, downloaded January 22, 2007).

Figure 5.4. Willow Creek Community Church, links for newcomers, found on numerous pages of the website (www.willowcreek.org/wondering.asp, downloaded January 23, 2007).

Some scholars argue that rhetorical practices constitute or construct the identity, the sense of self, of the audience (Charland, 1987); another way of describing this phenomenon is that texts imply or invoke an audience (Jasinski, 2001a). The numerous photos of people on the megachurch website homepages, gathered into "family" groupings on both of the Saddleback sites and smiling into the camera on the Willow Creek site, established a sense of identification with those in the pictures: engaged in relationship with friends and family members, content and happy. The audience invoked appeared by their dress and demeanor to be middle class, not disabled and slightly racially mixed but mostly white and heterosexual. Chaim Perelman argues that the audience's "views of the real and the preferable, as imagined by the speaker, must form the initial common ground between speaker and audience, the starting points of argumentation" (Gross, 1999, p. 204). According to Perelman, what is real includes what the audience views as normal, and what is preferable includes what the audience values and views as good. Congregational websites construct an argument using words and visual components. For potential visitors, the argument centers around reasons why the viewer should engage with this congregation. For current members and attenders, the argument centers around further engagement with this congregation. In an age of

church shopping among multiple options for church, websites play a role in keeping church members happy and involved. All three kinds of websites in this study appeared to be attempting to establish what is real or normal, and they tried to appeal to what they imagined the audience values and views as good or what they imagined to be desired by potential visitors to the site. In the case of the megachurches, reality or the normal was conveyed as being heterosexual, slightly racially mixed but mostly white, middle class, and happily engaged in family life. Intimate relationships and family relationships were valued, as were joining, belonging, and connecting with this congregation. The view of what is real and what is valued seemed clearly laid out and fixed by the church, so the audience was encouraged into a fairly narrow path of joining or engagement, albeit with multiple options of how and where to engage.

Genres on Megachurch Websites

Examining the genres that are referenced on websites gives us further information about the strategy of the congregations which create the sites. Genres are "groups of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics" (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978, p. 20). Studying genre reveals the conventions and affinities a text shares with others, and it can also reveal the unique aspects of that particular text. One way to discuss genre is to compare it to the concept of family resemblances. A family of texts coalesces into a genre in the same way as members of a family share some, but not all, characteristics, such as appearance, personality, and speech patterns (Jasinski, 2001a). This comparison with family resemblances allows us to understand that a family of texts will have some common characteristics but will also have some diversity in style, argument, structure, and situation. Organizational websites are, in themselves, a genre, with accompanying expectations: at their most basic, almost all websites will have verbal and visual elements and hyperlinks. The more complex members of the genre will add additional elements, such as photo montages, videos, slideshows (where photos or graphics take turns filling one space), downloadable music files, links in the form of graphics rather than words, and opportunities for virtual community (blogs, online polls, chat, messageboards, groups,

etc.). Any of these elements can range in quality from poorly done to sophisticated, so the websites themselves vary in overall level of quality. Congregational websites fit into the organizational website genre, presenting the organization's identity, priorities, values and goals (Esrock and Leichty, 1998; Winter et al, 2003), and they vary widely in complexity and quality.

Genre as a rhetorical concept originated in the writings of Aristotle (1991), who described genres of speeches. Scholars began to argue that some speeches were actually hybrids of two or even three of those genres (Jasinski, 2001a). With the proliferation of forms of communication came a proliferation of genres, bringing Aristotle's total of three to a much greater number, limited only by the ability of critics to describe and defend the genres they propose. With the increase in the number of genres comes the possibility of even greater hybridization. Websites can easily be seen as hybrid genres because of their patchworked nature (Döring, 2002). Congregational websites in particular are likely to be hybrid genres, in part because they draw on material that used to be, and often still is, scattered all over the church building: photos from bulletin boards, calendars from newsletters, mission statements from brochures for newcomers, and sermons from church libraries. Each of the six websites I examined fit within the organizational website genre, but each had characteristics of other genres as well as I will demonstrate below, so I am arguing that each of these websites is actually a hybrid genre. This assessment is helpful because it enables the viewer to see more clearly the way the church's perspective was crafted.

The two megachurches, Saddleback Community Church and Willow Creek Community Church, had complex and sophisticated websites. For example, both Willow Creek's site and Saddleback's member site had three slideshows that ran continuously using professional quality photos and complex graphics. Both sites had numerous links in the form of graphics and a set of graphical links in a slideshow. Willow Creek advertised on its homepage that it offered video streaming of one of its ministries. Both sites shoehorned an amazing amount of information onto their homepages, a feat that required careful design by skilled website producers. Both of

these megachurch websites had a unified appearance, in contrast with many church websites which seemed a bit scattered because of the diverse ministries of the church and because the site often offered links to denominational or community ministries, each of which had its own graphical style. Both sites offered a high number of links to ministries within the church, with Willow Creek's homepage offering well over 100 links. Their text, graphics, links, and layout indicated that they sought to maximize their use of their website. Because these megachurch websites used so many high quality photos and graphics and demonstrated such a tight and coherent design, they might have conveyed to some audiences a sense of authority and credibility based on quality, increasing their persuasive appeal. Their appeal with other audiences may have been diminished because they might have been perceived as overly slick and somewhat manipulative because they were so obviously designed by professionals.

These two megachurch websites also had characteristics that resembled elements of another genre, the family photo album. Saddleback's member site used a slide show that ran continuously at the top of all its website pages (see Figure 5.2). The five photos in the slide show, which looked like they could have been taken in a photographic studio, showed groups of people with labels such as "couples small group" and "singles 40+ small group." A total of 37 people were pictured, all gazing into the camera, all posed relatively formally. The people were all adults, with several ethnicities represented. The Willow Creek site had a slideshow in the upper left corner of the site beside the name of the church (see Figure 5.3). This slideshow also ran continuously on all the pages of the website and showed a total of more than 20 people pictured individually in head shots within a circular frame – men, women, and children of all ages and with some variation in ethnicity. Again, all the individuals were looking right at the camera. The use of head shots implied an intimacy between the viewer and the person in the photograph (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1999). Because the Willow Creek photos were tightly cropped, they seemed to be less formally posed than the Saddleback photos. Both of these websites, nonetheless, drew on the genre of family photo album. The Saddleback site was a more formal album, with studio quality

photos, while the Willow Creek site was a more informal family photo album. In both cases the probable purpose was to communicate that these very large churches could be small and intimate, like a family. Because the photos recurred on most of the pages of these two websites, the family photo genre influenced the entire site.

The websites of these two megachurches also had components of sophisticated print and TV advertisements, which were designed to persuade the viewer to do or purchase something. For example, the unity and coherence of the sites, coupled with a large quantity of information shoehorned effectively into a small space, spoke of professional graphic designers at work. The sites had complex, contemporary graphics and high quality photographs. These two websites offered multiple options for worship attendance and multiple opportunities for engagement: small groups, volunteer opportunities within the congregation service opportunities in the nearby community, mission trips to help with disaster relief and long-term overseas projects, to name only a few. These options and opportunities were coupled with a high number of imperative verbs, such as "join," "belong," "grow," "serve," "look here," "learn about," "rediscover," and "sign up." The many photos of individuals and groups looking into the camera also fit the advertising genre. When a person in a photograph looks straight at the viewer, it is a form of direct address, acknowledging the viewer explicitly. Kress and van Leeuwen (1999) call this kind of image a "demand," because the participant's gaze "demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relationship with him or her" (p. 381). Although there were no explicit demands made of site visitors, Kress and van Leeuwen's concept of "demand gaze" can be extended to characterize the overall ethos of these two megachurch websites, which implicitly and explicitly encouraged viewers to respond by coming to the church and joining into activities. Carolyn R. Miller advocates a kind of classification by genre based on consideration of social or situated actions rather than syntactic or semantic analysis. Her approach could be called "ethnomethological" because "it seeks to explicate the knowledge that practice creates" (1984, p. 155). The megachurches, with their family photo albums, complex and numerous graphics, imperative verbs and announcements that resembled

advertisements, were strenuously urging a particular social and situated action: come and engage in our congregational activities.

Multiple Options within a Unified Voice

These options for engagement on megachurch sites and the way they were presented raise another issue. In our post-modern, fragmented culture, Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia is essential for congregations: a tenuous balance point between centripetal and centrifugal forces, movements that pull us towards a unitary voice and contrasting movements that push us in directions that are scattered and disordered. Our culture draws us outward, pushing us toward diversity and multiple options to such an extent that many people feel they have lost any centering principle around which to orient their lives. Churches want to express that they have a unique opportunity to offer something significant in the midst of the fragmentation that people experience every day; they hope to offer a timeless message that will help draw people closer to a center and provide a balance to the chaos of the culture. The concept of heteroglossia captures the essence of this point of balance. In churches, a balance point is needed between the centrality of faith and a fragmented world, and the balance point between the biblical mandate of affirming one faith, one Lord, and one Spirit, while also affirming multiple ways to act, serve, and use one's gifts (I Corinthians 12:4-7). Congregational websites, like all discourse coming from congregations, must navigate this path between unitary voices and diverse voices, and these "voices" can be found in verbal text as well as in photos and graphics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The nature of this balance point between centripetal and centrifugal forces varies in the web discourse of the three kinds of congregations in this study.

On the two megachurch websites, multiple options for engagement, multiple photos and graphical links, and the diversity in the graphics expressed the congregation's complexity and the fact that people have numerous options for places to join in. No one path for engagement in congregational activities predominated; no particular way of serving God was platformed above other ways; multiple worship services and numerous fellowship groups and ministry opportunities provided places

for connection for people with different needs and desires. On the Willow Creek website, dozens of links connected the viewer to pages that described diverse programs such as cancer support, divorce recovery, grief support for children, men's breakfasts, senior connections, marriage matters, and health ministry. While a diversity of ways to engage was highlighted with words and visuals, both websites were tightly structured and few distinct voices were represented. The announcements of events were so brief that the voices of the event planners were largely lost. There were no links to outside organizations. The photos were tightly cropped or formally posed, so little was visible of the context of the photos; therefore the story that lay behind the photo was almost impossible to discern. Both websites occasionally used stories or testimonies from individuals within the congregation, but they were brief and focused on the benefits of the congregation's ministries. The Willow Creek homepage had a link labeled "Spiritual Questions? Look here" which led to a page with three paragraphs about being a spiritual seeker. Below the paragraphs were five links:

1. Why do you want to know God?
2. Are you placing limitations on God?
3. What do you think about Jesus ?
4. How will you respond to Jesus?

Some Practical Helps[104]

Questions are a way to bring in diverse voices, so at first glance these questions appear to be dialogic. However, these questions are addressed to the viewer, not phrased in the voice of the viewer. These questions reflected a pattern that was common on both the Willow Creek and Saddleback websites. The congregational commitments to diversity lay in providing options on their sites for people with diverse needs to connect with the congregation's ministries, not in providing a place for varying voices. These websites presented an appearance of being dialogical and heteroglossic, but in reality they were tightly scripted.

The Saddleback member site had a link on the homepage labeled Bible Q and A, which sent the viewer to a page with 52 questions. At the top of the page was a

[104] All quotations from the Willow Creek and Saddleback websites were downloaded October 31, 2006.

statement, "The following questions and answers have been taken from actual questions from Saddleback members and the resulting answers from Saddleback Pastors' [sic]. If you have questions about what Saddleback believes the Bible to teach on any topic that is not answered here, please contact your Small Group Community Leader." The questions, then, reflected the voices of the congregation members and addressed a wide variety of topics from Saddleback's perspective, such as homosexuality, stem cell research, abortion, marriage to an unbeliever, baptism, raising children, tithing, and healing. The answers were typically 3-5 paragraphs long, and each answer presented the viewpoint of the Saddleback pastors, without affirming in any way that Christians may differ in their positions on these subjects or that Christians may differ in their interpretation of the Bible. Missing on both the Saddleback and Willow Creek websites were many of the characteristics of dialogicality that were visible on the other sites, shown later in this chapter: statements that diversity was welcomed, places where the diverse voices of the congregation members could be heard, emphasis on the whole Christian tradition or other churches, photo galleries of artists presenting God's truth in a variety of ways, or an emphasis on creativity or mystery.

Home and Family; Intimate and Very Large

The metaphors home and family are used in advertising and political speech to describe many institutions and nations (Sputa, Marchant, Rothlisberg & Paulson, 1996; Bundang, 2002; Lakoff, 2002); they are also commonly used in Christian circles to describe aspects of congregational life (Frambach, 2003). "Family" is an "ultimate term" (Weaver, 1953) that draws on deeply held, archetypal notions of good and evil. We have already noted that megachurch websites evoked the genre of family photo album in the ways they use photographs. Saddleback Community Church used the metaphors of home and family extensively to invite people into the life of the congregation. On the homepage of their visitor site was a list of seven questions and statements, each of them a link. One question – "What does Saddleback have for my

family?" – linked to a page with a series of links to age-group ministries in the church, and three paragraphs which illustrated the use of these two metaphors (see figure 5.5):

> Our family would love to welcome your family to church next weekend. We have opportunities for each member of your household to enjoy themselves as they encounter God through the Bible and other people just like you.
>
> As you look at the links on this page, you'll see a personal note from the pastors who lead our children's, student's and college groups. We hope this helps you to get a personal and friendly first look at Saddleback, but we realize that this is just a web site. The best way to find out all that's here for you and your family is to visit us this weekend.
>
> If you'd like more info about Saddleback, check out www.saddlebackfamily.com, the Web site for those who call Saddleback home. This will give you an "insiders view" of life at Saddleback.

The congregation was described by the metaphors home and family, which transfer their meanings onto the congregation. In this case, in some places, the meaning of family was also retained in its usual sense as household. The Saddleback visitor website used photos to convey the concept that the kind of families and homes being evoked to describe the congregation were happy, untroubled and traditional. The series of families pictured on the homepage of the visitor site were all smiling, healthy-looking, and appeared to be heterosexual. To the right of the paragraph cited above, on the page linked from the homepage, were three photographs: a long narrow photograph of flowers; a larger rectangular photograph of a man, woman and four children, all looking into the camera, with five of the six people smiling; and an even larger photograph of part of the church building. The verbal metaphors expressed in the three paragraphs were echoed in the photographs: a happy, healthy traditional family, a church building, and cheerful flowers were linked visually. The home and family metaphors were used strategically on the Saddleback website, invoking an "insider's view" as well as the "personal and friendly" aspect of homes and families, and transferring those concepts to the congregation.

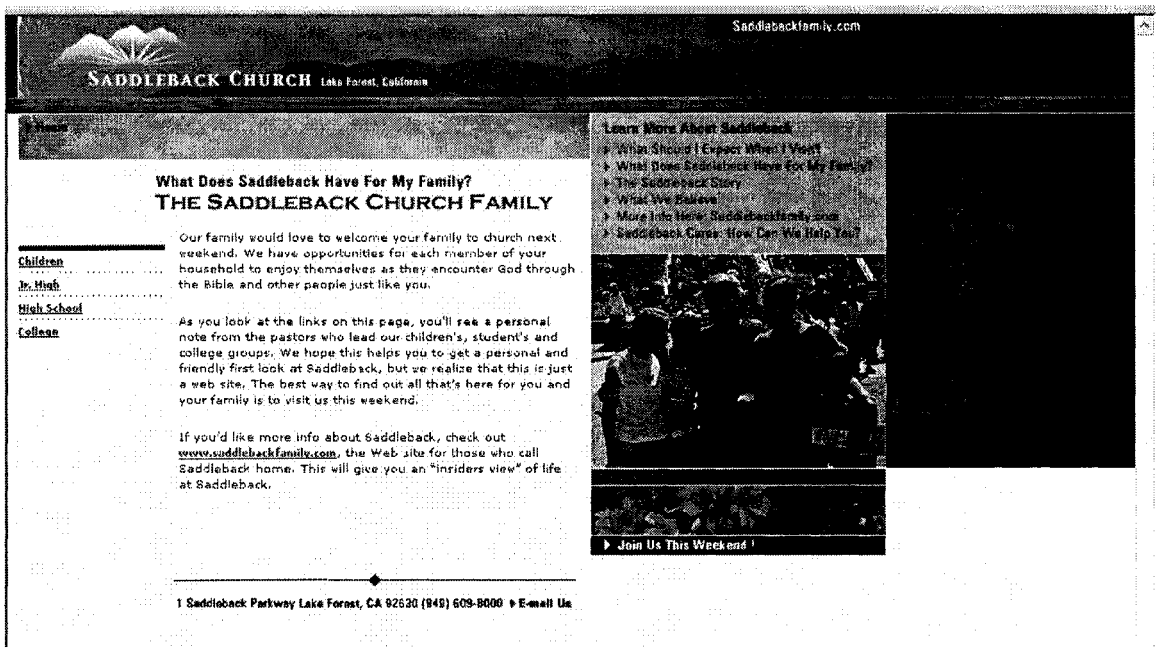

Figure 5.5. Saddleback Community Church, information for families, linked from the homepage of the Saddleback visitors site (www.saddleback.org/flash/family.html, downloaded January 22, 2007). None of the photos are slide slows.

The Saddleback member's website had a page listing eight reasons, each with a paragraph description, why people should join a small group. The second reason was, "You will begin to really feel like part of God's family," and the description of that reason read:

> Most people who have been a part of a group say the greatest benefit is the close relationships and friendships that develop. They will frequently telephone each other during the week to share an urgent prayer request or an exciting answer. You'll discover that your needs and problems are not unique – we're all in the same boat. It helps to know that others are facing the same difficulties, or have lived through them and learned spiritual principles in the process. Over fifty times in the New Testament the phrase "one another" is used to describe our relationship to other believers. We are instructed to love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, accept one another, bear one another's burdens, and build up one another. The only way you can obey these commands is in a small group! We really do need each other. God never meant for you to go it alone in the Christian life. If you're lonely, the answer to your problem is to join a group.

While the family metaphor was more prominent on the Saddleback site, the Willow Creek website expressed its commitment to intimacy in many ways. Bill Hybels's welcome letter, available on a link from Willow Creek's homepage for newcomers, mentioned that the church was very large, which gave people the option to join into congregational activities as much or as little as they desired. "But if you look closer," Hybels wrote, "you'll find that in many ways we're small. In fact, we're actually a network of small groups. And if you'd like to develop authentic and enduring relationships with others, then you'll be glad to know that new groups are forming all the time." On another page, linked off Willow Creek's homepage, was a description of a new initiative for the congregation called "Neighborhood Life," which in part involved a monthly meal in neighborhoods. The link on the homepage said, "A place to belong, grow and serve." The text, on another page, asked, "Why Neighborhood Life?" and answered, "Neighborhood Life responds to a fragmented world — one with declining social ties and lives stretched thin by demanding work hours, long commutes, jam-packed schedules. . . . Neighborhood Life is the optimal place for life change similar to the experiences of the early church where spiritual development and outreach happened right where you live." Neighborhood Life was one of an array of fellowship groups and small groups that were promoted on Willow Creek's website as a way for people to connect. On one page of the Willow Creek site, three testimonies were given by people who had recently joined the church. Each was only one paragraph long, and in one of them a man names Rus said the church's motorcycle fellowship "is such a wonderful, warm-hearted group that the fellowship I experience with them is like being in a very close family." Another newcomer, a woman, reflected, "I am delighted to be part of such a caring and creative body. The membership process was stimulating and formed friendships and bonds that are ongoing. We have a small group that grew out of the membership class!" These direct quotations are a form of dialogicality cited by Fairclough (2003).

Both the Saddleback and Willow Creek websites did an effective job of inviting people into smaller communities through the announcements of opportunities to get

involved and become connected. The effectiveness lay in their words of invitation; the photos they used that conveyed a sense of welcome, family, and home; and in the multiple links to opportunities for involvement. These two megachurch sites didn't provide an extensive theological or theoretical framework to describe why community matters in the Christian life; their invitations to community seemed to be based on expediency as much as theology. The paragraph from the Saddleback web page advocating joining small groups, quoted above, said that being in a small group helped a person obey the commands of the Bible. The words from Bill Hybels on the Willow Creek site stressed that small groups were a place to nurture authentic relationships. The megachurch sites seemed to saying that in this fragmented world, intimate relationships were a good idea and biblically-obedient, and in a big church, intimate settings need to coexist with the larger gatherings. On these two megachurch websites, efforts to promote intimate community were portrayed as expedient and helpful, not necessarily central to what it means to be a Christian.

Identity and Engagement on Megachurch Websites

In summary, both Saddleback and Willow Creek used their websites strategically to express their organizational identities and encourage engagement. Saddleback's visitor and member sites encouraged involvement in ways that fit their separate audiences. In the same way, Willow Creek's links for visitors on the homepage and other pages allowed the congregation to articulate multiple paths to involvement that were appropriate for visitors and members. Both websites were hybrids, linking the website genre with characteristics of family photo albums and compelling advertisements. The sites exercised persuasion by drawing viewers into the family photo album and vigorously inviting participation through the use of the demand gaze and imperative verbs. The home/family metaphors, used both visually and verbally, evoked intimacy, contentment, prosperity, and health, and encouraged engagement with the congregation while also expressing aspects of the identity of the congregation: these churches were portraying themselves as both big and small. Both websites, through the ways they addressed their audience, invoked what was real and

what was preferable – family, home, health, vibrancy, and activity – and these values appeared to be closely connected to their identity as congregations. Their presentation of their identities as congregations were further revealed by the form of heteroglossia found on the sites. An astonishing array of options for engagement were described visually and verbally – not many congregations offer a motorcycle fellowship – but the diversity of activities and ministries was not coupled with parallel diversity in voices and opinions. The few voices of congregation members were brief, the congregations' unitary voices were strong, and only one way to think about many issues of faith was articulated on pages that answered questions or expressed faith positions.

Vibrant Liberal/Mainline Church Websites: A Gentle, Informed Welcome

The two vibrant liberal/mainline churches, Seattle First Baptist and St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, are much smaller than the two megachurches. While the two megachurches are non-denominational and evangelical, both of these liberal congregations are linked to a mainline denomination – the American Baptist Church and the Episcopal Church in America, respectively. However, these mainline congregations have in common with the megachurches a sense of vibrancy and life. Their websites were engaging and interesting, and the congregations were portrayed as having plenty to offer a prospective attender. Both of these sites exemplified the conventional organizational website genre, with photos, verbal text, and numerous hyperlinks, and both were moderately sophisticated websites for a congregation. However, both sites lacked the highly sophisticated and complex nature of the websites of Saddleback and Willow Creek; for example, they had no slideshows, fewer links to audio or video, and the number of photos and graphics on their homepage and other pages were much smaller. Both First Baptist and St. Gregory drew on other genres in addition to the website genre, and I will begin examination of these congregational websites by considering the hybrid genres present.

The St. Gregory of Nyssa website, like the two megachurch sites, looked like a photo album. However, in this case, the album did not picture a nuclear family. This

website featured dozens of photos of the church building and of worship services in progress (see Figure 5.6). The photos of the building and worship services served to emphasize the place and the community assembled as a whole, perhaps a very extended family. Almost none of the photos of people involved a demand gaze; instead they showed groups of people dancing, singing, praying, or listening in worship, interacting with each other and presumably with God. The congregational leaders wore brightly colored robes from Africa and Asia, and the feel was festive and international. St. Gregory's church building was built in the 1980s and is quite innovative, with two separate spaces for the worship service, one space for the liturgy of the Word and one space for the Sacraments. The photos on the website made clear that the congregation dances from one room to the other in the middle of the worship service. The tall, octagonal wing used for the Sacraments is painted with 74 historic figures in the style of icons, all of them dancing, and the website featured a clear and large reproduction of each figure with a brief description of who he or she is or was. Unlike many icons, these figures do not look at the viewer; their eyes are all focused slightly to the left of the onlooker. Kress and van Leeuwen (1999) use the term "offer" to describe photos in which the people look away from the camera, indicating that these photos propose or suggest something rather than insisting. St. Gregory's photos "offer" rather than "demand." This contributes to a sense that St. Gregory's congregational activities are available for those who are interested and that people are welcome to participate. However, unlike the megachurches, strenuous urging is absent.

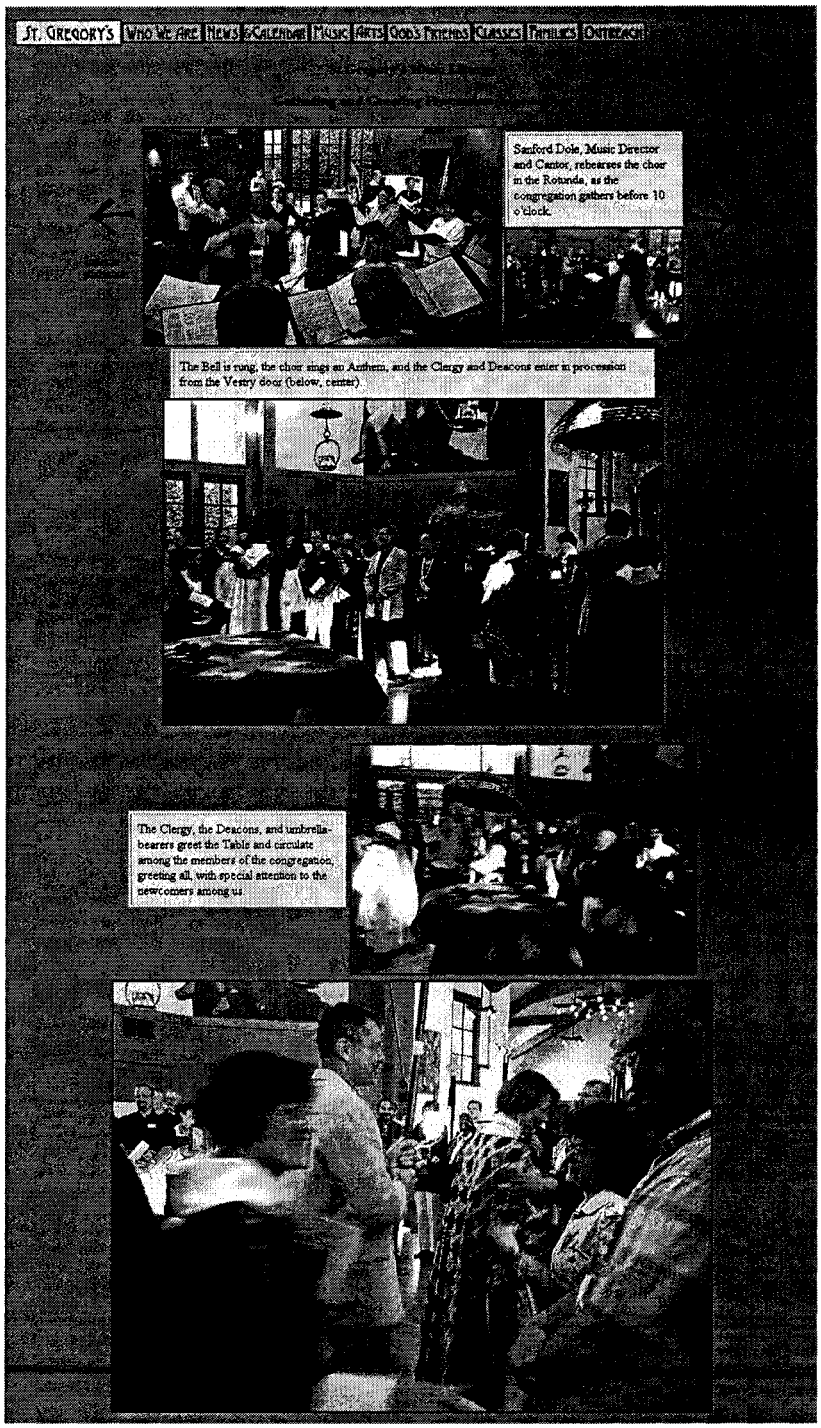

Figure 5.6 . St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, photos of worship (http://www.saintgregorys.org/Liturgy/Photos/10am/Gathering.html, downloaded January 22, 2007).

Its verbal texts also offered welcome rather than demanding action. "How do we live as friends of God? At St. Gregory's, this is a question we explore together. We make use of ancient traditions and shared experience as we find our way through the modern world as a Christian community."[105] This language, without direct use of imperative verbs, fits the genre of a bulletin board in a church building. Bulletin boards are often used in congregations to post photos showing the congregation in action. Congregational activities such as picnics, retreats, classes, and children's events are often photographed and posted on bulletin boards to help both newcomers and congregation members see the kinds of activities they might participate in. These photo bulletin boards often have brief descriptions accompanying the photos, describing the event and implying that the viewer was welcome to join in next time. Accompanying its photos, the St. Gregory's website gave a verbal description of the typical pattern of worship services; the history of the construction of the church building, completed in 1995, and the philosophy behind various aspects to the building; descriptions of the people pictured in the icons painted on the walls; and descriptions of the various outreach ministries offered by the church. The photos and descriptions on St. Gregory's website offered the possibility of engagement without urging it strenuously.

The homepage of the website of First Baptist Church, the second liberal/mainline church, had many characteristics of congregational print media that preceded websites, such as newsletters and brochures: a lot of verbal text, few graphics and photos, a mission statement, a brief history, a sermon excerpt, and a calendar of classes, coupled with few imperative verbs and no photos of people gazing into the camera (see Figure 5.7). Over the course of the months I observed the website, the homepage format stayed the same, but about two thirds of the verbal content changed frequently. Each week a new sermon was posted in the right hand third of the page, with the first few paragraphs (approximately 250-400 words) on the homepage and with a photo of the minister delivering the sermon, always dressed in a black academic robe with a brightly colored stole, not looking into the camera. The photo was a frozen

[105] Downloaded October 24, 2006.

frame of a video of the previous week's sermon, so the text of the sermon was available in both written and video form. In the center column, the calendar items changed regularly as well, and these items included dates and names of various events with descriptions ranging from 25 to 150 words[106]. In the left-hand column, the list of contact information, the mission statement (61 words) and the "About Us" statement (102 words describing the congregation's history and expressing welcome) remained the same over the months I observed the site. This contrasts with the megachurch sites, where only phrases and brief sentences were used on both sites. The longest description on the Willow Creek homepage was 20 words,[107] and that included the title of the event and the dates it was offered. The use of extended verbal descriptions, rather than numerous photos, graphics, or brief invitations, indicated that First Baptist's site drew on the newsletter/brochure genre.

[106] On November 10, 2006.
[107] On October 24, 2006.

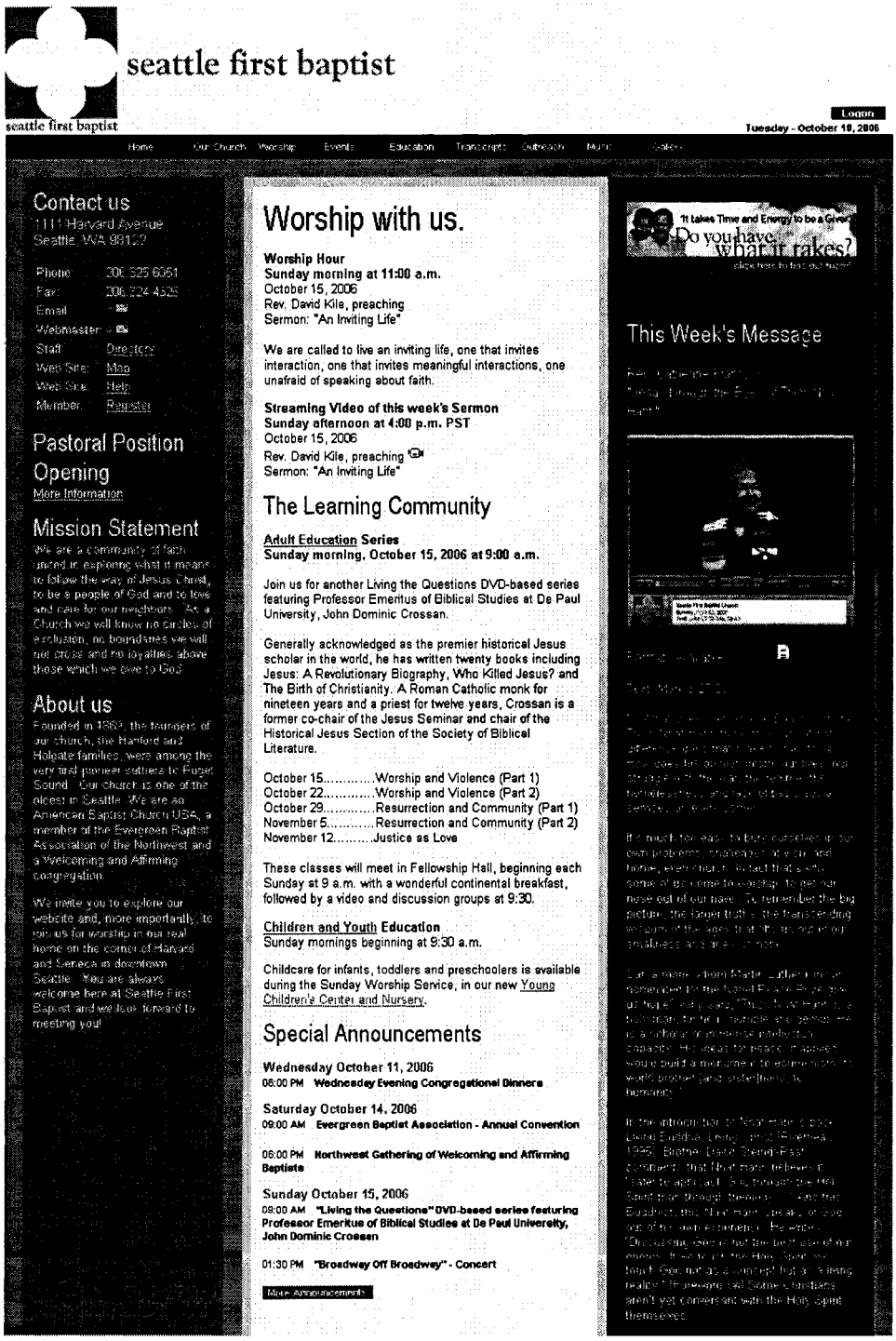

Figure 5.7. Seattle First Baptist Church, homepage. The sermon text in the right hand column continued for two more paragraphs, which are not visible in this view. The photo of the minister was a frozen frame in a video of her sermon (www.seattlefirstbaptist.org, downloaded November 1, 2006).

The two liberal/mainline churches established their sense of authority and credibility on their websites not by their embrace of the highest standards of website design, like the megachurches did, but by means that have been traditional in churches for generations. St. Gregory's homepage had a picture of its building at the top right, with the words "Welcome Home" superimposed on the photo (see Figures 5.8 and 5.9). First Baptist used a photo of the minister, again at the top right, always dressed in a robe. The building and the minister have traditionally been sources of identity and values for congregations. On First Baptist's homepage, the presence of abundant information conveyed authority. On St. Gregory's homepage, information about and a photo of the congregation's award-winning food pantry conveyed further authority. These two churches invited participation by giving information, both visually (St. Gregory's) and verbally (both sites). For these two mainline/liberal churches, what was real or normal was a highly educated form of choosing based on information, and what was valued was tradition, as already shown, and inclusion, as shown below.

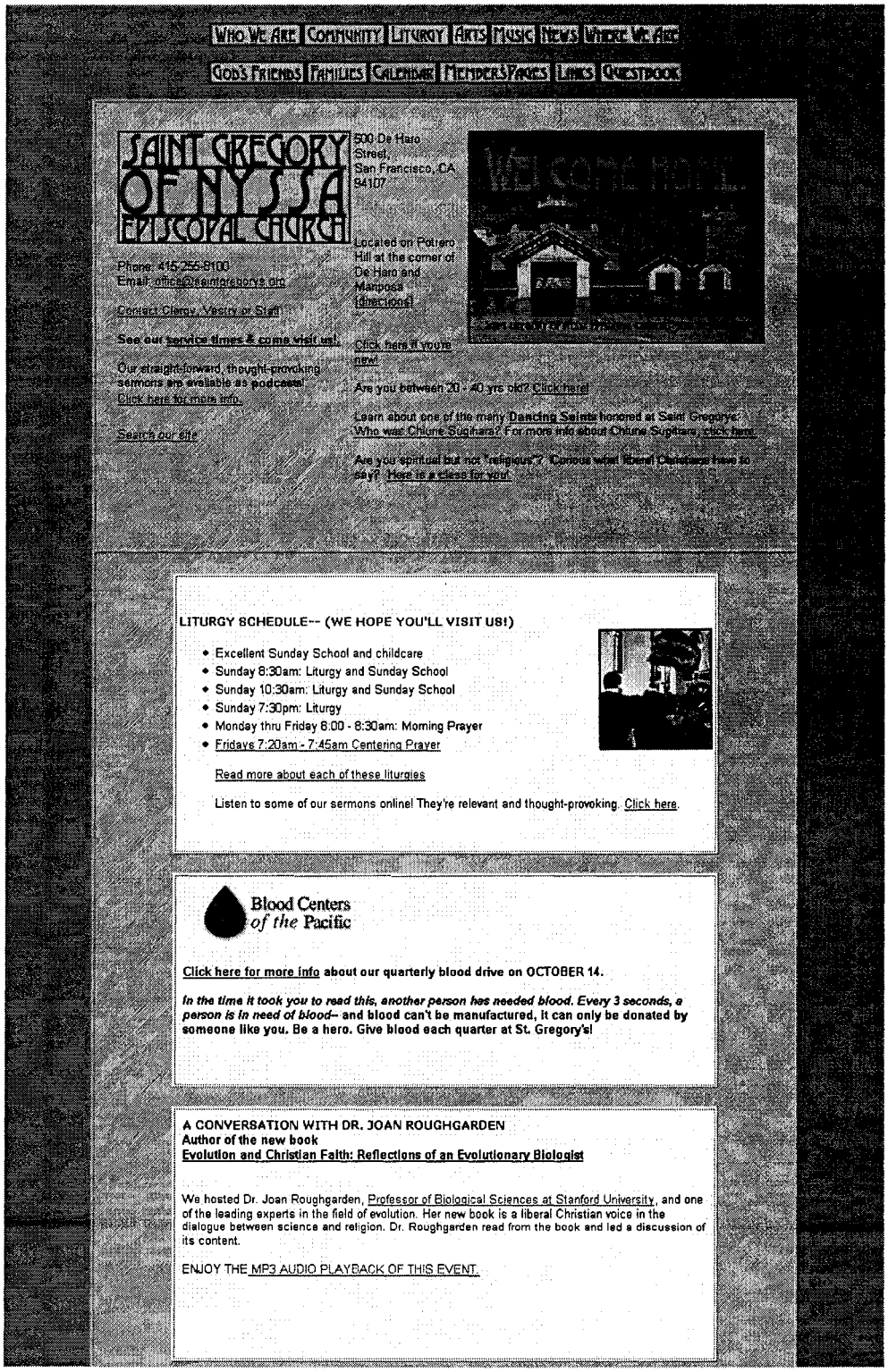

Figure 5.8. St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, top half of homepage (www.saintgregorys.org, downloaded November 1, 2006).

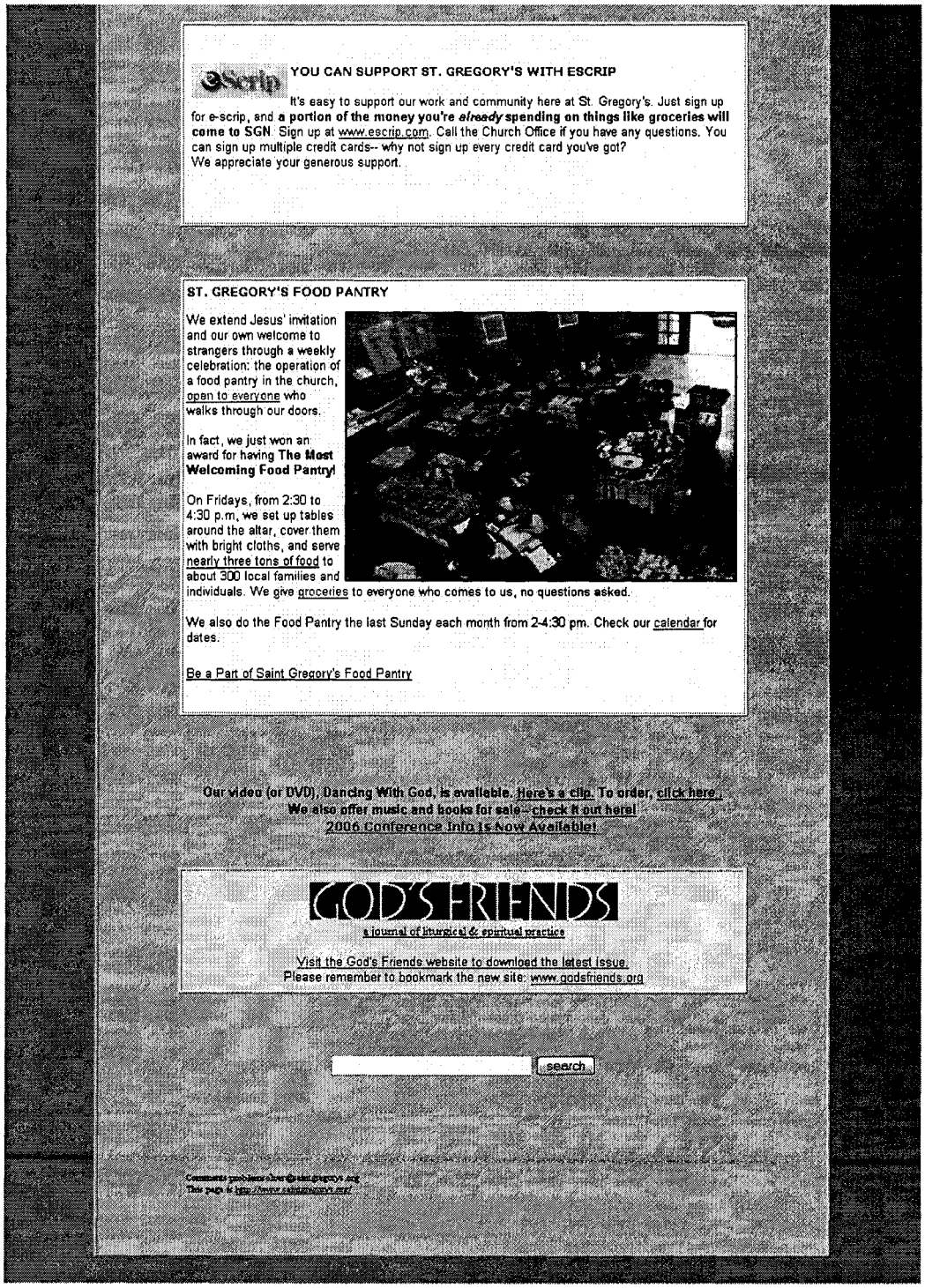

Figure 5.9. St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, bottom half of homepage (www.saintgregorys.org, downloaded November 1, 2006).

Welcoming Diverse Voices

The concept of heteroglossia reveals insights about the ways these two liberal/mainline congregational websites balanced unity and diversity. The megachurch sites appeared to embrace diversity because their sites had so many options for involvement; upon looking deeper, the presence of a single unitary voice on many matters of faith and lifestyle could be easily found. The vibrant liberal/mainline churches were the opposite. Seattle First Baptist's website, for example, looked on first glance to use a strongly authoritative voice and allow few diverse voices, in part because of the homepage with its abundance of verbal text, the single photo of a minister in a black robe, and the presence of video and written text of the previous week's sermon.[108] Photos of congregational activities can bring an awareness of the many stories that members bring to congregation, but the entire First Baptist website used relatively few photos and, of those, many of the photos were posed choral groups or photos from the church's history. On the navigation bar, one of the nine categories was "gallery," and three of the "gallery" categories that might have brought a sense of diversity to the website – "people," "events," and "art" – were non-functional links. One of the three "gallery" links that worked show photos of the building, which yet again communicated an authoritative voice.

Yet the words and some of the photos on First Baptist's website were dialogic and expressed the congregation's openness to diverse voices, while affirming the centrality of the Christian faith. One example is found in the only part of the website that showed numerous congregation members in action, the part of the gallery that showed 33 photos of past peace marches that congregation members had participated in. These photos contributed a strong sense of diversity in action. A second example, another working part of the gallery, showed photos of the church building that had been morphed into amusing shapes, along with a "photo" of the Beatles walking across the street in front of the church (see figure 5.10), the only sign of humor on any of the

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[108] All observations and quotations from the websites of Seattle First Baptist and St. Gregory of Nyssa were observed/downloaded on October 28, 2006

six websites I studied, and a sign of heteroglossia, balancing the congregation's love of the building with creativity of expression.[109] Bakhtin (1981) wrote: "Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" (p. 23), which reinforces the sense of freedom communicated through humor, as well as the invitation provided by humor to engage creatively with the subject at hand. In addition, on First Baptist's homepage, a three-paragraph description gave information about an upcoming three-week class using the DVD of a Roman Catholic writer talking about "living the questions"; both the speaker – a Roman Catholic speaking in a Baptist Church – and the topic brought diversity of voice, and the long description of the class on the homepage honored that diversity.

The mission statement, posted on the homepage, included the words, "As a Church we will know no circles of exclusion, no boundaries we will not cross." In the two paragraphs below the mission statement, labeled "About Us," a brief history of the congregation was given, followed by the congregation's affiliations, including being a "Welcoming and Affirming congregation," indicating that gays and lesbians were welcomed. The homepage had a link to "Distinctives," which was a list of 13 characteristics of the congregation, including statements about Baptist liberties, a commitment to justice and compassion, their identity as a "peace church," and a statement that men and women were equal partners. At the top of the "Distinctives" page was a statement set apart in large type (with the first and last sentences in black and the three middle sentences in green):

> As a church family, we want to help you find something you can do with your life that is even more extraordinary than what you are doing already.
> **It's *not* about becoming a Baptist.**
> **It's *not* about saving your soul.**
> **It's *not* about asking you for money.**
> **It's about all of us helping one another to live our lives with passion and service.**
> (bold in original)

109

Another link from the homepage, to "communal values," took the viewer to a list of eight values which included valuing each person's spiritual journey and their freedom to shape that journey; valuing diversity of opinion, ethnic diversity and diversity of lifestyle; valuing traditional Baptist liberties; and being welcoming and affirming. All of these intentional statements affirmed the congregation's openness to hearing diverse voices, which balanced the authoritative voice in the pictures of the black-robed pastor and the traditional building.

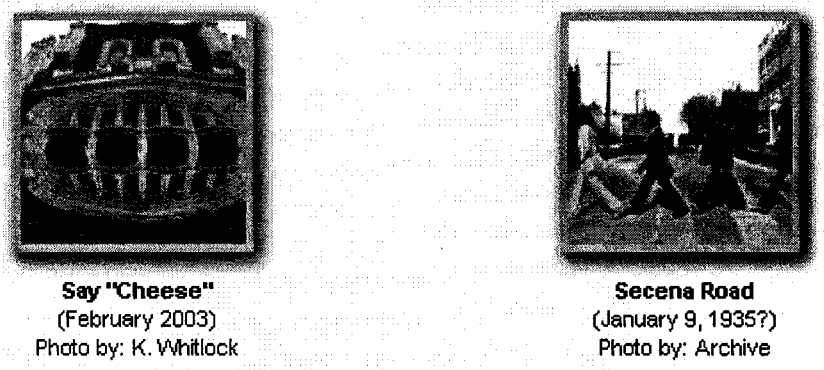

Figure 5.10. Seattle First Baptist Church, from the "Just for Fun" page (www.seattlefirstbaptist.org/Common/Gallery/Default.asp?rW=1024&rH=768&Gallery=fun&Header=Gallery%20Just%20For%20Fun, downloaded January 23, 2007).

The St. Gregory of Nyssa website also used both photos and words to communicate heteroglossia, the balance between unity and diversity. On the homepage, two advertisements brought diversity of voice: a encouragement to give blood, which used text and graphics from the blood bank, and a brief summary of a talk given by a Stanford professor on science and religion, with a link to MP3 playback of the talk. The website had a long page of frequently asked questions (FAQs), which brought in the presumed voices of questioners. The form of these questions in the voices of congregation members contrasted with the "spiritual questions" on the Willow Creek site, which used "you" (e.g. "Why do you want to know God?"). In addition, the congregation's mission statement affirmed both the unity and diversity of heteroglossia: "St. Gregory's Church invites people to see God's image in all

humankind, to sing and dance to Jesus' lead and to become God's friends." The congregation had a separate purpose statement: "Our purpose is to invite people of the San Francisco Bay Area to discover that they are God's friends, and in practicing God's friendship to find their unity with all people." Four subpoints under the purpose statement, describing how this purpose would be met, expressed the heteroglossic balance of centripetal and centrifugal language. The first two subpoints served as an effective illustration of this balance: "1. Celebrating Jesus' resurrection in worship drawn from Christian tradition and the whole human experience of God's friendship, and involving song, dance, music, quiet, prayer, communion, welcome, thankfulness, and compassion. 2. Listening openly for God's word in the Bible, with the help of accurate critical scholarship, as well as in Christian teaching and experience, in each other, and in God's friends of other faiths." The references to Jesus' resurrection, the Christian tradition, God's word in the Bible, accurate critical scholarship, Christian teaching and experience are centripetal, while "the whole human experience" and "God's friends of other faiths" are centrifugal, as are the multiple options for engaging in worship.

The most visually effective expression of heteroglossia on the St. Gregory's website was the array of photos of the worship services, the building, and the icons on walls of the sacramental space. The photos on the website, with their accompanying text, made clear that the traditional aspects of the Christian faith (centripetal speech) were honored here: The Word of God was so important that it had its own space. The Sacraments were equally honored with their own part of the building. Both Word and Sacrament were so central that they were celebrated with robes of gorgeous fabrics from all over the world and with dancing and singing. Yet the fabrics from around the world were centrifugal, as were the words in the letter for newcomers, which stated twice that the congregation desired to be inclusive, and the website viewer could see in the photos of worship services that diverse people had accepted that invitation. In addition, photos of the worship space included Ethiopian crosses and several objects from the Buddhist tradition. This diversity provides heteroglossic balance to the

authoritative speech of Christian tradition. The icons of the dancing saints continued the visual representation of heteroglossia. On the website, the photos of the icons were accompanied with brief biographies that explained their connection to the Christian faith and to Christian values (centripetal speech) while their diverse visual representations brought a variety of visual "voices" (centrifugal speech). Both First Baptist and St. Gregory affirmed on their sites the centrality of Christian tradition using photographs and words. However, while First Baptist invited diversity largely through its use of words, St. Gregory's invited diversity both with words and photographs and illustrated the way that diversity was experienced in the congregation.

Explicit Inclusion and Embrace of Diversity

The concept of community promoted by First Baptist Church and St. Gregory of Nyssa on their websites was centered in their commitment to inclusiveness and diversity. First Baptist's mission statement began with the words, "We are a community of faith," and the congregation identified itself as a "community of faith" in other places on the website. The mission statement also emphasized inclusion. The 13 distinctives of the congregation included "We are a welcoming and affirming congregation; sexual and gender minority persons are naturally integrated into the congregation in a relaxed way," and "We value congregational fellowship where friendships and mutual support are evidenced among our members." The eight values of the congregation included: "We value the diversity of opinion, ethnic diversity and diversity of lifestyle in this congregation."

The First Baptist coordinating pastor, on a page titled "The Learning Community," continued this theme linking community to diversity and inclusion:

> Churches are not neutral. They espouse values. They have a message. They have an agenda. They have vision of how things could be. There are, at least, two responses to this reality. One is the way of indoctrination. Indoctrination has to do with imparting knowledge from one generation to another, or from a source of authority to newcomers. Indoctrination requires agreement as to a message, a vision, an agenda, a set of values. Because Seattle First Baptist is a place of varied messages, visions, agendas and values, indoctrination doesn't fit our needs.

> The other way is by becoming a Learning Community. Seattle First Baptist Church has always had vital classes, and it has been a community where questions, searching, and openness are evident throughout our communal life. . . . We are not a complacent church. Nor is this an entirely comfortable place. It is a place for seekers. It is a place where activists can find spiritual anchor and spiritual seekers can find their calling in the world. It is a place where Great Ideas that come from a variety of sources are confronted. It is not a place of conformity or uniformity.
>
> We do seek to be a transforming community and we believe that God is the source of this transformation. As we make new commitments toward being a Learning Community, we open ourselves to God's transforming power at work in our midst. [Underline in original.]

The vocabulary used in the first paragraph provides a vivid illustration of unity and diversity: "a message . . . an agenda . . . a set of values" coupled with, in the same paragraph, "varied messages, visions, agendas and values." This vision of community included the discomfort that came from a true welcome of questions and a willingness to listen carefully to viewpoints that were not one's own.

In the same way, St. Gregory's also emphasized inclusion as a part of community. A link on the homepage labeled, "Click here if you're new," led to a nine-paragraph letter from a congregation member, who noted below her signature that she also happened to be the webmaster. She used a warm conversational tone: "We'd love to talk with you . . . there is really no substitute for a personal greeting, a warm handshake, an understanding hug." She acknowledged that visitors likely had many questions, and that people who had previously had bad experiences in churches often felt very comfortable in this church. She talked about the priorities of the congregation, described the ministers, and invited viewers to call the church office if they had more questions. Her letter to newcomers almost equated inclusion with community:

> We're interested in being inclusive, in active questioning and discussion in a respectful setting. . . . Did we mention that we value inclusiveness? We value community, and we constantly work to nurture it. At the same time we strive to not become closed, tribal, or form cliques. We welcome people from all backgrounds, and in case you were wondering, that includes people from all sexual orientations. We really view ourselves as a spiritual community.

The fact that the letter for newcomers was written by a member, rather than a pastor, was a vivid expression of heteroglossia, as was another aspect of community expressed in the letter: "We really value getting together in person, and hearing and honoring each other's stories. We'd love to hear yours. So I do hope you'll come try out a few services with us."

Identity and Engagement

These two congregational websites placed a high value on many of the traditional values of the Christian faith, like the two megachurch sites did. Yet the description of Christian community on these two mainline church websites was quite different than that of the megachurches. On these two church sites, a certain type of community was intimately connected with the Christian faith: community that was diverse and inclusive, with many different voices encouraged and welcomed. Classes at First Baptist included a Buddhist-Christian dialogue. St. Gregory's, in its mission statement, said it "invites people to see God's image in all humankind." This broadness of inclusion as an essential part of community on these two church sites gave a different focus than was found in the two megachurch websites, and was a key aspect of the identity presented by these vibrant liberal/mainline congregations. A few direct invitations were present on these sites. One of the few imperative verbs on the First Baptist website was "Worship With Us" at the top of the center column of the homepage, words that did not change in the months I observed the site. The St. Gregory's letter for newcomers, linked from the homepage, encouraged people to visit the congregation. However, the bulk of the encouragement to become engaged with the congregation or to participate more fully came through the giving of verbal and visual information. A gentle and informed welcome was extended with little of the urgency of the invitations on the megachurch websites. The liberal/mainline churches drew on models that pre-date websites, with a gentle invitation of welcome: in the case of St. Gregory's, a church photo album or bulletin board showed a place for innovative worship, and the photos might help the viewer feel inclined to join, and, in the case of

First Baptist, a great deal of newsletter or brochure-like verbal information might give the viewer information about how to fit in to the congregation's activities.

Emergent Church Websites: Trendy Coffeehouses

The two emergent churches analyzed, like the megachurches, were not affiliated with a denomination. Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis and Cedar Ridge Community Church outside Baltimore appeared from their websites to be similar in size to Seattle First Baptist and St. Gregory of Nyssa. Emergent churches are generally viewed as evangelical in theology, like the megachurches. Notably, though, the websites of Solomon's Porch and Cedar Ridge had a different feel from both the two megachurches and the two mainline churches, drawing on neither the family photo album genre nor the printed newsletter genre. The two graphical elements on the homepage of Solomon's Porch[110] were dreamy artistic montages of photos and graphics (see Figure 5.11). The photographic elements included a tree, a part of a building, and a person's shadow on a cracked sidewalk. Cedar Ridge Community Church[111] had six photos of individuals on its homepage, and all the photos were slightly out of focus, eliminating any comparison to slick advertising (see Figure 5. 12). Further, the photos also differed in style, gaze and color, conveying an artistic approach, and each of the six photos linked to a personal story by that individual, ranging in length from 6 to 20 paragraphs, describing their faith journey. Cedar Ridge's website also had a photo of the roofline of the barn where the congregation met, a photo of an outdoor scene, and a wide band of wallpaper consisting of a photograph textured paper with bits of mostly indecipherable writing on it. The visual components on these sites were reminiscent of a gallery display of contemporary art. These two sites used only a few imperative verbs and offered more opportunities for online interaction than the other two kinds of churches. Over the five months I observed the site, Solomon's Porch offered a member login, a place to submit prayer requests by email, and a link on the homepage to sign up for an email newsletter, while Cedar

[110] On October 19, 2006.
[111] On October 19, 2006.

Ridge offered a sitemap and a link labeled, "Join a Virtual Community! Click here to join the Talking Points, Announce, Prayer, Classifieds, or E-Post list." At one point during those months, Cedar Ridge also offered a link for people to submit their thoughts about the vision of the church.

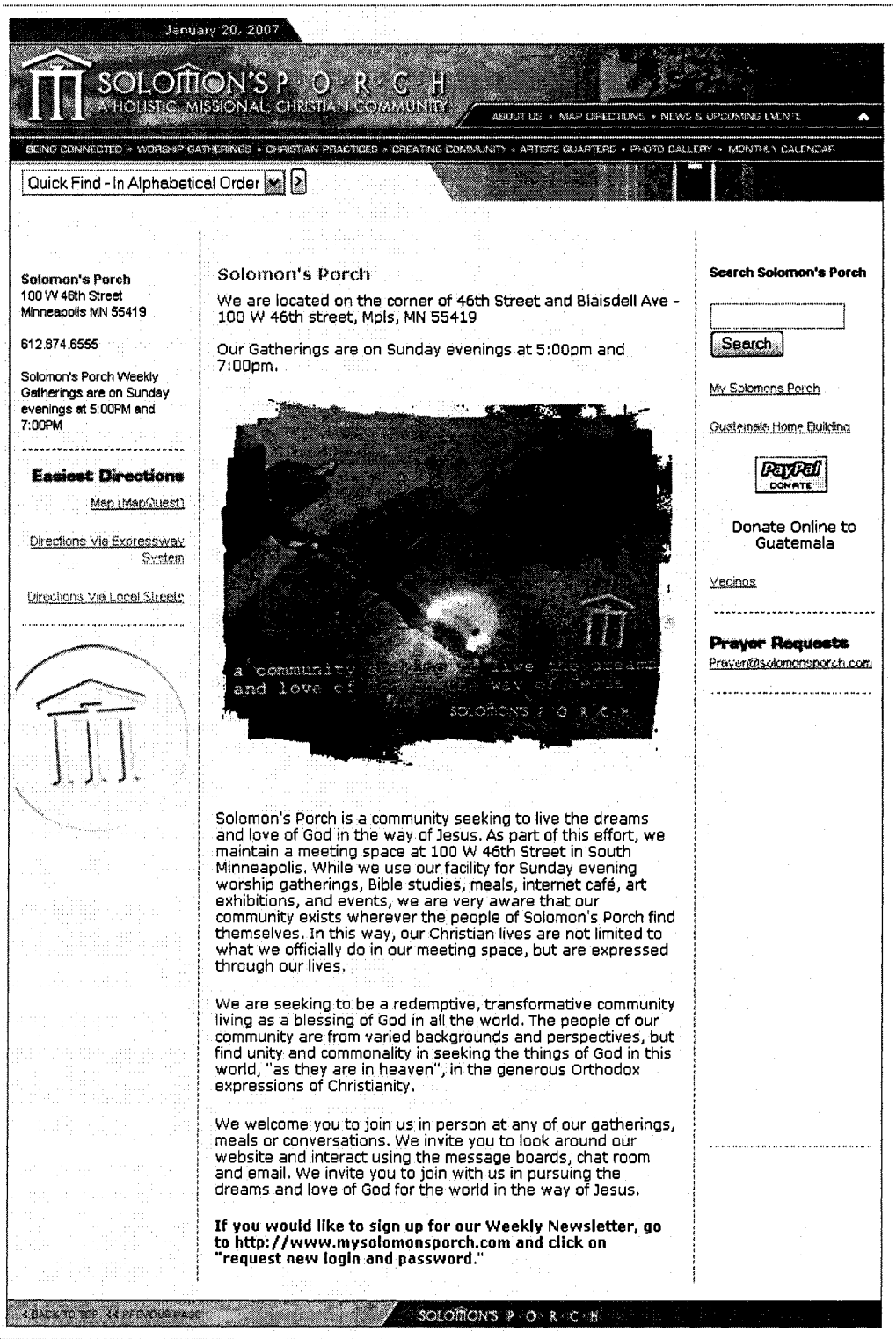

Figure 5.11. Solomon's Porch, homepage (www.solomonsporch.org, downloaded January 20, 2007).

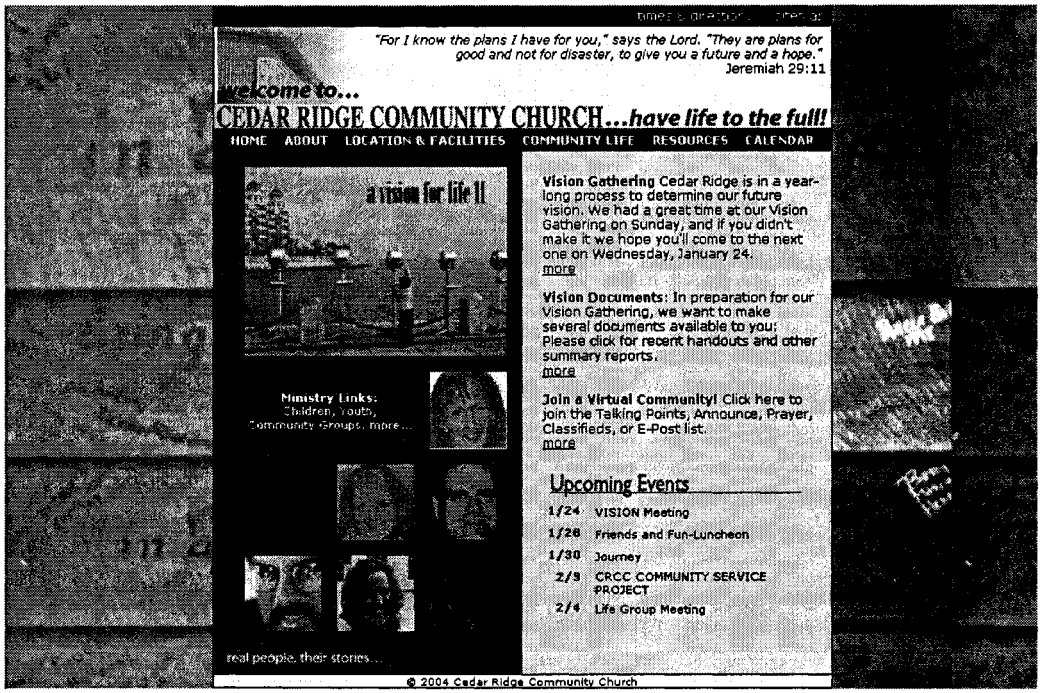

Figure 5.12. Cedar Ridge Community Church, homepage. The quotation at the top of the page varied each time the page was loaded in. The six photos of individuals linked to personal stories by each of the six people (www.crcc.org, downloaded January 22, 2007).

Indeed, Solomon's Porch offered a link from its homepage to a virtual art gallery with the work of numerous visual artists. In addition, an arts group meeting was described, as were places in their church building where art was displayed, an artists' coop, and art opportunities connected with the church year. Cedar Ridge met in a converted farmhouse on a piece of farmland, and the website described the ways the congregation was trying to preserve the land in an environmentally friendly fashion. The genre these websites seemed to appropriate was a trendy, eco-friendly coffee bar offering a contemporary art display and wireless internet connection.[112] The ability of

[112] Two weeks after I came to this conclusion about the coffee house genre of the emergent church websites, *Leadership Journal* (a journal for evangelical pastors) had two articles comparing church ministry to coffeehouses. Both articles were written by pastors, one in Illinois and one in Washington state. One pastor works part time as a barista, and he described what he learned about Christian ministry

these websites to persuade viewers in their twenties and thirties was linked to their ability to enter into their daily worlds, which for many included working, talking, reading email, surfing the web, and just hanging out at coffee shops. Kenneth Burke argues for a connection between identification and persuasion: "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude [and] idea, identifying your ways with his" (Burke, 1950, p. 55). The family photos in the megachurch websites accomplished this sense of identification, as did some of the other photos on those sites that show people engaged in various activities. The two emergent church websites used identification even more cleverly to establish connection with their audience. Their artsy photographic montages, environmental emphasis, and opportunities for virtual community – which combined to give the feel of a contemporary coffee house – spoke the language of Generations X and Y, as did the links to Mapquest for directions on the Solomon's Porch site and the virtual community links on the Cedar Ridge site. The emergent churches were inviting people to come to an artsy coffee house, with opportunities for connection if desired. The emergent churches invoked an audience in their twenties or thirties with the option to join in the congregation's community but with permission not to join in as well. This approach was miles apart from the megachurch sites, with their strenuous encouragement to participate.

Creativity, Innovation, and Mystery

The balance between centripetal and centrifugal speech on the emergent church websites had a different feel than what was found for the two liberal/mainline churches and the two megachurches. The Solomon's Porch homepage had three paragraphs describing the congregation, with the following paragraph first:

> Solomon's Porch is a community seeking to live the dreams and love of God in the way of Jesus. As part of this effort, we maintain a meeting space at 100 W

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through his role of preparing and serving coffee drinks (Swanson, 2006). The second article focused on the ways that coffee houses resemble aspects of healthy congregational life: they create places where people are known, where diverse tastes are affirmed, and where community can gather (Asimakoupoulos, 2006). While the articles did not indicate whether or not these two pastors serve emergent churches, the comparison of a church to a coffeehouse parallels what I observed on the emergent church websites.

> 46th Street in South Minneapolis. While we use our facility for Sunday evening worship gatherings, Bible studies, meals, internet café, art exhibitions, and events, we are very aware that our community exists wherever the people of Solomon's Porch find themselves. In this way, our Christian lives are not limited to what we officially do in our meeting space, but are expressed through our lives.[113]

Several aspects of this paragraph drew on Christian tradition and provided language that kept the congregation centered: the meeting space, the worship gatherings and Bible studies and the purpose statement "a community seeking to live the dreams and love of God in the way of Jesus." However, maintaining the meeting space was described as only a part of meeting that purpose; the expression of the Christian life continued all week long through the daily lives of the people in this community, a statement that embraced diverse expressions of faith lived out in diverse settings. On a page labeled "Our Dreams," a 23-bullet point list contained centripetal items such as:

- We listen to and are obedient to God
- People who are not Christians become followers of God in the way of Jesus
- Those who are not involved in church would become an active part of it
- People are deeply connected to God in all of life; body, mind, soul and spirit
- The kingdom of God is increased in real ways in the world
- The Biblical story of God is told and contributed to
- People learn the ways of God and are encouraged to make it central to their lives

In addition, the list contained items that are centrifugal or that represented that balance point between forces drawing inward and outward:

- Beauty, art and creativity are valued, used, and understood as coming from the Creator
- Joy, fun and excitement are part of our lives
- We value innovation and are willing to take risks in order to bring glory to God.
- Everyone is equipped to do ministry
- People participate in the kingdom of God in accordance with their abilities and gifts
- Peoples' visions and ideas of ministry come to life
- God's Spirit takes precedence over all structures and systems
- Other churches are valued and supported

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[113] All material from the Solomon's Porch website downloaded October 28, 2006.

Beauty, art, creativity, joy, fun, excitement, and innovation take people in diverse directions and encourage a variety of voices; the equipping of people to do ministry, using their various gifts and drawing on their visions and ideas, affirms that there are multiple ways of doing things; the stability of structures and systems was balanced with the free movement of God's spirit; and other churches' ways of doing things were affirmed and valued. These were heteroglossic, affirming diverse voices and encouraging multiple ways of doing things, while the centrality of the Christian faith, obedience to God and Biblical authority were also upheld.

The Solomon's Porch website also exhibited the affirmation of diverse voices in its art and music pages. The congregation members composed all the music that was sung at worship services, and music downloads were available on the website. The work of eight visual artists was highlighted with photos of their work, and three art shows were displayed that presented the work of numerous additional artists. The site had a page where original poetry could be submitted. Solomon's Porch homepage had no photos of individuals looking into the camera. The only individual pictured on the homepage was in a photo montage that included the congregation's logo, and the person's shadow on the sidewalk was pictured, not the person herself. This picture of a shadow, with no direct address, could be interpreted to give permission to the viewer to engage with this website, indeed with this congregation, in a variety of ways. Solomon's Porch, evangelical in its theology,[114] maintained on its website a clear picture of the centrality of Jesus Christ, coupled with the affirmation of many ways of expressing that faith.

Cedar Ridge Community Church also is evangelical in theology. Its website used this mission statement: "Cedar Ridge Community Church exists to help people have life to the full. We welcome people into a dynamic Christian community where

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[114] Noll (2001) cites four questions that have been used in research to identify "evangelical conviction": crucicentrism ("through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of my sins"), biblicism ("the Bible is the inspired word of God" or "the Bible is God's word, and is to be taken literally, word for word"), conversionism ("I have committed my life to Christ and consider myself to be a converted Christian"), and activism ("it is important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians") (p. 31).

they can connect — with God, with one another and with opportunities to make a difference in our changing world."[115] On one website page, a 10-paragraph statement expanded on each phrase in the mission statement, with quotations from the Bible and references to Jesus and "the good news of Jesus Christ." These forms of centripetal speech were balanced on the homepage by six photographs that linked to long personal stories, as well as the invitation to engage in virtual community in a variety of forms. One of the intriguing features of Cedar Ridge's homepage was the quotation from a contemporary or historic Christian at the top of the page. Every time the homepage was loaded, a different quotation appeared. All of the quotations were Christian, but the diversity of authors mirrored the church's apparent openness to a diversity of voices. Cedar Ridge had a page on its website entitled "Our Values." Six pairs of words were listed as values, and each pair had a long paragraph description:

- Authenticity/Integrity
- Connection/Community
- Acceptance/Diversity
- Innovation/Creativity
- Balance/Wisdom
- Spiritual vibrancy/Mystery

These six pairs are distinctly heteroglossic, expressing the congregation's commitment to both unity ("integrity," "wisdom," "spirituality vibrancy") and diversity ("innovation," "mystery," and the word "diversity" itself). In summary, heteroglossia was just as present on the emergent websites as it was on the mainline/liberal websites. On the emergent websites, the centripetal language was verbal and more traditionally evangelical. The voices of diversity were not simply encouraged by the words and photos on the websites, but diverse voices were actually present in the photos by various artists (Solomon's Porch) and in the voices of congregation members describing their personal journey (Cedar Ridge).

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[115] All quotations from the Cedar Ridge website were downloaded on October 31, 2006

Explicit and Missional Community

The emphasis on community among emergent churches has brought the issue into closer focus for many congregations in recent years, but in the past few decades most churches have devoted time and energy to creating places where people can connect with each other in the midst of a culture characterized by fragmentation, isolation, and broken families. As shown earlier, the megachurch and mainline church sites in this study strongly emphasized connections between people. In this analysis of six congregational websites, the two emergent churches used the word "community" the most frequently. Solomon's Porch, in the three paragraphs on its homepage that we saw above, used the word four times. On a page with the header "About Us," four characteristics of Solomon's Porch were listed (holistic, missional, Christian, and community) with a brief explanation of each. The concepts of community and connection recurred frequently. Under "Holistic" was the statement: "Understanding that all areas of life are connected, including faith, time, family, work, body, money, intellect, et al."[116] Under "Missional" were several sentences expressing the congregation's commitment to serve God and their neighbors. The closing sentence read: "In this sense, Solomon's Porch doesn't have a mission; it is mission." Under "Community" were these words: "Desiring to share life with one another in a way that we become a living, breathing, local expression of the global, historical body of Christ." On the webpage labeled "Our Dreams," one of 23 statements was: "Christian Community is the attraction to outsiders and the answer to questions of faith." The word "connected" also appeared several times on the website in phrases like "opportunities to be connected with one another."

Many of these same emphases appeared on the Cedar Ridge website when community was discussed, as was evident in the mission statement: "Cedar Ridge Community Church exists to help people have life to the full. We welcome people into a dynamic Christian community where they can connect — with God, with one another

[116] All quotations and observations in this section on community were downloaded or observed on November 2, 2006.

and with opportunities to make a difference in our changing world." At Cedar Ridge, community was viewed as the space that provided opportunity to connect in three directions: with God, with other people, and with places for service. Again, community was largely seen as an end in itself, not as a means to an end. Cedar Ridge's 2005 strategic plan had four components (connection, disciple-making, leadership and impact). In addition to an emphasis on community in the component entitled "connection," the component "disciple-making" emphasized that being and making disciples takes place in "authentic community."

Cedar Ridge's statement of values, shown earlier, contained six pairs of words, each described with a paragraph. Five of the six paragraphs contained a reference to community or relationships as a small or major component of the values expressed. Under "Authenticity/Integrity" was an encouragement for people "to be authentic with God and one another. This value means we don't hide our rough edges and struggles." Under "Balance/Wisdom" was a description of wisdom as a guide "towards integrated, holistic, systems thinking, encouraging synergy instead of competition within our community." Under "Spiritual Vibrancy/Mystery" was an encouragement of fellowship as a spiritual discipline. Under "Acceptance/Diversity" was the expression of the desire to be "a safe and accepting place for people, whatever their background. . . . We reach out to a wide variety of people and encourage them to explore their questions and progress in their spiritual journey at their own pace. We welcome them with their unique blends of experiences, gifts, challenges, and insights, believing that we will be enriched as a community by the contributions of each individual."

Further, one of the six values was labeled "Connection/Community." Many of the same themes from the Solomon's Porch website appeared in the paragraph describing this value:

> For us, church is not just a disconnected crowd of people who attend public programs together. Our ideal is a dynamic balance that we call "mission through community," believing that mission is essential to community, and community to our mission. This balance takes time, effort and vulnerability. But how can people experience the rich life God intends for them unless they are connected with others: serving and being served, challenging and being

> challenged, giving and receiving forgiveness, teaching and being taught, giving and receiving, failing and being encouraged and offering encouragement to fellow strugglers? How can people experience the "life to the full" offered by Christ if they never laugh and cry and work and communicate and forgive and experiment and rest and work together, connected to God and one another in a dynamic community of faith?

Cedar Ridge stresses that community requires "time, effort and vulnerability." Serving, being challenged, forgiving, teaching, giving, receiving, encouraging, laughing, crying, working, communicating, experimenting, and resting together are laid out as aspects of the kind of community that was encouraged and equated with living "life to the full." On these two emergent church websites, the concept of community was not abstract or expedient. Community was defined and described with specific verbs and attributes, and the encouragement to engage in community was grounded in extensive discussions of Christian theology. As portrayed on their websites, engagement in community for these churches was closely related to their identities, and their offer of community – which the website viewer or worship attender was free to engage in or not – was paramount in what they encouraged people to consider doing.

Identity and Engagement

The two emergent church websites did not make direct invitations for new people to visit; their invitation was inherent in their evocation of trendy coffee shop as genre. They seemed to want new people to feel comfortable if they came, just like they would be in a coffee shop, with no pressure to connect but with the option for community – both in online and face-to-face – always present. Yet at the same time the websites expressed theological urgency about community; they made clear that their central purpose as a congregation and their ability to do mission in the world were intricately connected to the kind of community they developed, and they desired that their communities be authentic, honest, and missional. These two congregational websites illustrated their welcome of the diverse voices of their congregation members by posting members' stories and artwork, and by making blogs and other forms of online interaction available. They practiced community on their websites, in addition to talking about it.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to provide an interpretive analysis of the three kinds of congregational websites through rhetorical analysis of congregational websites. This analysis continued the process begun in chapter four of presenting patterns in features and vocabulary that contribute to the conceptual framework of this study. In addition, this chapter provided an interpretation of the patterns in the ways the features and vocabulary are used on the sites, giving a more unified view of the three kinds of congregations. One more concept is worthy of note as this chapter comes to conclusion. As mentioned earlier, Warnick et al. (2005) describe a form of interactivity on political campaign websites that they call "text-based interactivity," which consists of "rhetorical techniques and features of the website text itself that communicate a sense of engaging presence to site visitors" (Warnick et al., 2005, introduction, ¶ 4). An oral style, in contrast to a written style, contributes to text-based interactivity. The six congregational websites explored in this chapter effectively use this form of interactivity. The informal style of the welcome letter on St. Gregory's website was a clear example. The author, despite being the webmaster for the congregation, portrayed herself as a just another member who enjoyed the ministers' preaching and the colorful worship services. She said she welcomed phone calls from people who had more questions, and she asked readers, when they visited, to find her and let her welcome them. On the emergent church sites, the slightly off-beat photos and the continuous emphasis on community conveyed a desire for interaction. The megachurch websites, with all their photos of individuals, their creative and contemporary graphics, and their descriptions of multiple options for engagement, gave the viewer a sense of interaction, a sense of "engaging presence." All of these websites made good or excellent use of the basic features of websites – text, graphics, and hyperlinks – and exercised a form of text-based interactivity that made their sites welcoming and encouraged engagement both with the site and with the congregation. All six of these websites were produced by churches that are viewed as successful by some or many observers; their websites engaged the viewer on multiple levels just as, presumably, these congregations engage

their members and participants in multiple ways in worship, activities, relationships and service.

In addition to providing avenues to engage with congregational activities and information for both visitors and members, the websites represent the identity of these three kinds of congregations. In chapter four I compared the congregations to lenses: the megachurches as mirrors, the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations as windows, and the emergent churches as cameras. After conducting the analysis in this chapter, the comparison to lenses remains, and I want to present further portraits that have emerged in my mind. Evangelical megachurches represent themselves on their websites as big, busy families. Everyone can find a place to be productive, everyone can find a few other likeminded family members to talk with on a regular basis, and everyone can feel happy about being a part of this wonderful, lively, and outgoing family. New people are strongly encouraged to join the family, and they are encouraged to believe that their unique needs will be met in the course of family life. Family members are free to talk in an intimate way to those they are close to, particularly to those who have the same needs and concerns that they have, but they don't have much voice in the overall functioning of the family. The head of the family – the pastor or pastors, the board, and/or the staff – exercises a fairly tight control over the public face of the family, the way the family's values and priorities are presented to outsiders. The family embraces traditional Christian values, and it functions in a way that was common in some American families in the past who lived by the adage, "children should be seen and not heard." While the family members are not encouraged to be child-like in every way – many are encouraged to take leadership roles in small groups and ministries – family members are encouraged to be seen keeping busy serving and being involved with like-minded people, and they are not encouraged to think "outside the box" or to ask challenging questions. The family will be most effective in its functioning if all the family members keep busy and do their part, embracing the values of the whole family and letting the leaders speak for everyone.

In contrast, the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations present themselves on their websites as nurturing parents. Lakoff (2002) argues that conservatism, whether religious or secular, is based on the strict father model,[117] while liberalism is centered around a nurturant parent model. Nurturant parent morality, according to Lakoff, requires empathy for others and helping those who need help. In order to help others, one needs to take care of oneself, nurture social ties, and have empathy for oneself in order to have empathy for others. Morality is empathy, and moral action is nurturance of social ties and self-development. The portrait of vibrant liberal/mainline congregations on their websites closely fits this description, with the addition of several aspects. Vibrant liberal/mainline congregations find at least some of their strength to be nurturing parents through their continued embrace of traditional ties to their buildings, denominations, and communities, as well as their continued use of traditional styles of ministry, ranging from their traditional music choices to their emphasis on print media. Nurturing parents energetically encourage their children; in the same way vibrant liberal/mainline congregations provide a voice that encourages and embraces people on the margins. This voice is consciously oppositional to mainstream cultural values. While the megachurch as a big, busy family wants its members to be active in ministry, the vibrant liberal mainline congregation as a nurturing parent wants its members to have empathy for people in need. The vibrant liberal/mainline churches lack the structures, ranging from links on their websites to small groups to join, that the megachurches use to encourage involvement. The vibrant liberal/mainline churches do encourage engagement with the congregation as a whole, but in a less structured way, with the goal of helping members to embrace this ethic of empathy.

In contrast to both of the portraits above, the emergent churches present themselves on their websites as trendy, artsy, eco-friendly coffee houses, with options for face-to-face and online community if desired. They alone affirm a style of community that does not draw on family imagery or models. They affirm community

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[117] As portrayed by their websites, megachurch leadership does function like a strict father in a few ways, but not in every way. Therefore I am not setting up a contrast between megachurches and vibrant liberal/mainline churches based on Lakoff's categories.

and connection that are highly self-revelatory and honest; authenticity and the absence of masks are valued. The emergent church websites, in part because of their affirmation of authenticity, provide multiple opportunities for the voices of their members to be heard. Individual self-expression is valued. Just like the megachurches and the vibrant liberal/mainline churches, they value certain aspects of tradition that harmonize with their priorities. The emergent church websites express their value of early Christian tradition that teaches the significance of community and that stresses spiritual disciplines that can be exercised alone or with others. Their competence with electronic media gives them a contemporary flavor, which is balanced in an interesting way by their love of ancient history and their embrace of evangelical theology. They talk deeply about the theological issues that undergird their values. Just like a person in a coffee shop might get into a long philosophical discussion about current events, emergent church websites engage the viewer in deep theological conversations about the ministry of the congregation.

These three kinds of congregational websites are all speaking to American cultural values, but in distinctly different ways. Through their websites, all of these congregations are meeting the desires of Americans who are looking to the Christian faith to guide their lives and help them find meaning. The megachurch sites provide multiple options for connecting and abundant resources for people with specific needs. Their websites invite engagement on every level, through photos, verbal text, and links. A person who wants a place to get involved easily and comfortably can probably find it at a megachurch. The vibrant liberal/mainline church sites provide a setting with strong, particular values which would probably be attractive to a minority of Americans: a passion for justice and inclusive welcome, connections with the traditional church through denominations, and engagement with the community institutions in the neighborhood of the congregation. The emergent church sites, likewise, provide a setting with values that seem likely to attract a different minority of Americans: people in the younger generations who want a deep and honest experience of community and want to engage with the arts, historic Christian disciplines, and

service to the poor. Each of these types of church websites seem to accept the values of the groups of Americans they attract; each seems uncritical of the societal patterns – the big, busy family; the nurturant parent; and the trendy coffee-house – that they reify in their communication on their websites. The next chapter will further explore the societal values that seem to be accepted and promoted by these congregations, the cultural messages that are visible in their historical and institutional contexts on the websites of congregations.

Chapter Six

Enterprise, Online Communication, and Community: A Critical Analysis Including Interviews with Website Producers

> In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America where it became an enterprise.
>
> – Richard Halverson, former chaplain of the United States Senate, quoted on the website of the emergent church Matthew's House[118]

Congregational websites commonly embrace the tools and values of advertising. In doing so, they perpetuate an impression of the church as an enterprise and, in addition, continue the process of constituting the church as an enterprise. In this chapter, I explore how this happens by demonstrating that congregational life as described and constructed on church websites has become semioticized – "that is to say, dependent on symbolism, imagery and design" and engaged with "the promotion of ideals, images and lifestyle in its discourse" (Aiello & Thurlow, 2006, p. 149; see also Lash & Urry, 1994). I use social semiotic analysis to present these issues. Van Leeuwen (2005) describes the work of social semioticians in two ways that are relevant to this study. First, these scholars "collect, document and systematically catalogue semiotic resources" (p. 4). The previous two chapters engaged in that task, examining the use of visual elements, verbal text, and links on congregational websites. Second, social semioticians "investigate how these resources are used in specific historical, cultural, and institutional contexts, and how people talk about them in these contexts – plan them, teach them, justify them, critique them, etc." (van Leeuwen, p. 4). This critical analysis considers the links between the semiotic strategies used and the

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[118] According to http://www.matthewshouse.com/, these words were quoted in *The Awesome Power of Shared Beliefs*, E. Glenn Wagner (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995). Downloaded November 10, 2006.

political-cultural economy of the congregations studied, including the power relations which frame the practices of congregational branding. This chapter draws on interviews with producers of congregational websites,[119] and the insights are substantial.

The chapter opens with an overview of the interviews, which illustrates the variety of people who are engaged in the creation and maintenance of congregational websites. I interviewed ten website producers, representing all three kinds of congregations studied. The interviews revealed the range of roles served by website producers, their depth of knowledge about marketing and advertising, and their intentions to accurately represent their congregations through the websites. After a summary of the website producers, the chapter discusses the ways websites represent the contemporary U.S. advertising genre, with insights from the producers. Next, I present the ways the website producers talk about the semiotic resources used on the sites, followed by a discussion of the website producers' discourses about computer-mediated communication and community. The chapter concludes with further portraits of the three kinds of congregations.

The People in the Interviews

The interviews illustrate the range of individuals who are involved with production and maintenance of congregation websites. I interviewed four megachurch website producers and all were paid staff of the congregations. In the first instance, the staff person spent only a few hours a week on the congregational website. She had worked full time on a children's curriculum published by the church, creating web resources for people using the curriculum. When the person who had designed and maintained the congregation's website quit, this woman was asked to maintain the congregation's site. She spent a few hours each week keeping it updated with verbal

[119] The interviews were conducted by phone, and I took notes on the phone conversations. Because of the restrictions of the University of Washington's Internal Review Board, I was not permitted to record the conversations. Nor am I allowed to identify the interviewees. Therefore, no specific church websites are mentioned here and no portions of the websites were captured to illustrate the ideas presented by the interviewees.

information supplied by the ministry areas of the congregation, but didn't change any photos or the look of the site. The second website producer was employed by the congregation 30 hours per week, first to design the website and then to keep it updated. Before being hired by the church, and while employed there, he had his own business designing websites. The third interviewee worked as a website designer before being hired full time by the church to design and maintain the congregation's website as his sole responsibility. He looked over the weekly bulletin and extracted information appropriate to the website, "clean[ed] it up" by shortening the verbal text and made it "visually pleasing" by adding graphics, and put it on the website. The fourth megachurch interviewee was the communications coordinator for the congregation, supervising a staff of three in addition to herself, all of whom had a background in advertising or marketing. The team of four oversaw the weekly bulletin, graphic design for all the church's publications, external marketing, and the website. Several on the team made updates and changes to the website, and one of the congregation's pastors was also involved with decisions about web content.

My interviews also covered three vibrant liberal/mainline congregations. The websites represented by these interviews were among those I considered to be the most complex and attractive. In each instance, the website producers were members of the congregation. In one case, the website had been maintained for many years by the church secretary, who added information about upcoming events without changing the structure of the website. When she left the church, a group of congregation members volunteered to plan a newly designed site. I interviewed one of them, who had a background in both marketing and Christian ministry, and he reported that the group had decided on a new design which would be launched a few months later, but they had not yet decided how the site would be maintained. In the second vibrant liberal/mainline congregation, the congregation's website had been designed and was maintained on a volunteer basis by a member of the congregation who was a professional website designer. She devoted many hours per week to the site, changing much of the text on the homepage, posting a new video sermon, and archiving past

sermons. The third vibrant liberal/mainline site was maintained on a volunteer basis by a congregation member who worked in marketing. She had designed the site for pay when congregational leaders advertised for someone to design a new site. After she had finished the design, she decided she wanted to maintain it for free as a part of her service to the congregation. In this role, she changed verbal content frequently and visual content from time to time.

In three interviews related to emergent churches, I talked with people in quite different roles. One of the websites was maintained by a church staff person. She oversaw all congregational communications as well as human resources, illustrating that staff in smaller congregations wear many hats, whereas staff of the megachurches often specialize in one area. I also interviewed two people associated with one emergent congregation. One of them, a pastor who served the congregation in partnership with one other pastor, had desired to increase the opportunities for online connections, so he searched for appropriate software to pursue this goal. After he found the software, he looked for web designers with expertise in it. The church was in California, and the web designer he found was in Canada, so they collaborated by email. I interviewed the Canadian web designer, who designed websites full time and had designed several other church websites. The site was designed so it could be easily maintained by people who are not experts in web design. Once the site was up and running, the website designer made only occasional changes to it by request. The homepage was maintained by the pastor, and the other pages of the site were maintained by various church staff and leaders, who added both verbal and visual content.

In sum, a majority of the ten people interviewed had a background in marketing, advertising, and/or professional website production. Some worked full or part time for pay on the congregation's website, and some served as volunteers who saw their involvement with the website as service to the congregation. Most of the website producers talked about two major audiences for the websites: potential visitors who wanted to learn about the congregation and members who sought calendar

information or wanted to listen to a sermon they missed. The websites were designed and maintained with these two groups in mind. Several of the site producers also talked about a third audience, people looking for resources for their own congregation. The individuals interviewed were enthusiastic about their congregational websites, and most of them expressed a conviction that websites are a significant marketing and visibility tool for congregations. Because of the significant background in advertising and marketing of most of the website producers, and because websites draw on the advertising genre, I now turn to a discussion of advertising and its relationship to websites.

Advertising and Marketing

The full-time website producer at a megachurch said, "The website's purpose is promotion and information." He used the words "promotion" and "promote" frequently in the interview. Myers (1999) uses the term "promotional culture" to describe the extension of the rhetoric of advertising and the commodity market to many new areas of everyday life, including education, government and religion (see also Fairclough, 1989; van Leeuwen, 2005). The interviews confirm this extension of advertising to religion; several interviewees talked about connections between secular advertising and church website production. The full-time website producer at a megachurch described the difference between secular advertising and a church website as residing in the content. He said secular advertising was not as "clean" in its content; he seemed to be referring to the fact that congregations don't use sex or alcohol to sell. A megachurch website producer who works 30 hours per week for the church echoed this viewpoint. He said that websites were inherently value neutral and it was website producers who brought values to the sites. He said, "If you have a right walk with God and you bring that to it," then what one does on the website should be okay. He said that if congregations used pornography to entice people to come and visit, that would be wrong. But, he affirmed, "The internet and technology is [sic] a tool, so it depends what you do with it." One of the other megachurch website producers viewed her work

as simply fulfilling a task: "I pretty much promote whatever it is and make it accessible for the people who see it."

The woman who headed up a communication team at a megachurch talked at length about the way she viewed the website. She said, "We feel the internet is key in marketing to this generation. . . . The internet is just where everybody's going. Every business is on the internet and the church needs to be there." She noted that because all four of her team members were trained in advertising, they worked together well to create advertising campaigns for the various events of the church, using a variety of media. She noted that they frequently created images for print publications and for the video projection screen used in Sunday worship and then later adapted those images for use on the website, trying to "focus on whatever is the major look and hook for those campaigns. We try to tailor it to what will grab people's attention." When they designed the website, they created a different header for each ministry page: "We generated all of them so they would look alike and be catchy." She described the congregation's major ministry goal as attracting people who didn't attend church and who found plenty of interesting things to do on weekends. Website visitors "need to see that we are cool enough to compete with the other stuff that's out there. . . . What's going to get them in the door is something that's right up there with the cool look that's in other media. . . . We have to be able to compete with the secular market."

These same ideas about promotion of church events and the value-neutral characteristic of websites were expressed in the interviews with emergent church website producers. "The internet is a tool. It can be much more than just having a website that says if you want to contact us here we are," one of these said. Another said, "The web lends credibility to us. . . . The church needs to be relevant. It would make us obsolete if we didn't use the web. And we do try to engage culture as much as possible." He went on to describe his congregation's coffee shop and their online congregational marketplace, structured like Craig's List, as ways they try as a congregation to engage the culture and simultaneously build community. The third emergent church website producer said, in talking about how she writes verbal text for

the website, "I try to think of the site visitors as customers – how will this sound to them?"

The vibrant liberal/mainline website producers expressed similar ideas. One of them reflected, "Our website is our number one public visibility vehicle." Another website producer at a vibrant liberal/mainline congregation noted that from childhood, Americans watch Sesame Street, which sets an expectation of sophistication in communication, and "We don't feel comfortable if those standards aren't met." She expressed a commitment to creating websites that communicate a sense of place to give people a preview of what they might experience when they walk into a church; she viewed these websites as a way of helping people feel comfortable, akin to cleaning the pews. She said that some advertisements and some websites might be manipulative in some ways, but that it would be a mistake not to have a website. "It's like saying we're not going to install telephones because people say awful things over the phone," she said. It would be wrong to sell oneself in an inauthentic way on a site, but that by using websites strategically, "We are using the best of the culture."

Advertisements play a significant role in the "semiotization" of life, the privileging of words, images and design over substance (Aiello & Thurlow, 2006). In addition, advertisements play a part in the trend toward symbolic production as constitutive of social action rather than representative of it. Advertisements do these two things by making associations of meanings with commodities (Myers, 1994), and often these connections are hidden and seem natural. Ads achieve these associations in part through synthetic personalization (Fairclough, 1989), a casual, personalized style that appears to address the viewer as an individual (see also Cameron, 2000). This informal and personal form of address gives a sense of individually tailored service with the promise of individual choice (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006). Several of the website producers argued that because the content of church websites is different than secular ads, the pitfalls of advertising are largely avoided. Scholars who study advertisements would disagree, arguing that a significant part of the power of advertising lies in its intertextual nature (Myers, 1994). Ads are "parasitic" (Cook,

2001, p. 33), reminding viewers of other advertisements they have seen, even if viewers are unaware of this phenomenon. These scholars would argue that a photo on a church website of a person looking right at the viewer, accompanied by personalized language using "you" and imperative verbs, connects viewers with past advertisements they have seen and puts viewers in the position of consumers, people who are shopping for commodities.

Only one of the ten website producers expressed the concern that simply by creating highly visual websites that draw on the advertising genre, congregations may violate the purpose of a congregational website and become too connected to our consumer culture. She viewed focusing on the spoken word, in the form of audio and video sermons, as the central purpose of congregational sites. She seemed to have some understanding of the power of the website medium to draw the viewer into the position of consumer of commodity. "We do not use a lot of images. We use very few [photos] of people. We don't perceive ourselves as being flashy. We want you to concentrate on the message. . . . We want [viewers] to get interested in what we say and then go further into the website." This producer alone seemed to understand the way that components of advertising have become naturalized on websites, and she wanted to resist that tendency by enabling website viewers to focus on verbal content, particular spoken words. In addition, she made a noteworthy comparison between church and her other website clients. "A church website is unlike most brick and mortar commercial clients. A church website is based on events as opposed to products. Events have a short lived beginning and end date. Even a sermon is based on an event." Her contrast between events and products indeed does reveal one different between commercial websites and church sites. However, churches do more than offer events; they also provide services for the people who come, as well as opportunities for community and ways to engage in service to others. The services that churches provide could be considered commodities, but they could also be considered gifts given by the congregations to the people who need them.

The interviews were striking in that so few of the website producers expressed any concerns about the nature of websites as a part of the consumer culture, with the propensity to turn church life into a commodity. The acceptance of photos and words with the purpose of promotion has been naturalized to an extent that it seems like common sense; it was obvious to these website producers that churches need to have websites that use the most contemporary communication strategies. Only one vibrant liberal/mainline website producer reflected a sense of the intertextual nature of advertisements; she was concerned that too many photos would make the congregation seem "flashy." None of the website producers hinted, in their own words, of the process of synthetic personalization in verbal or visual events. Two of them talked about trying to reflect the voice of the pastor as they wrote text for the website and others talked about trying to make the text accessible, but only one exhibited consciousness of the dangers inherent in making texts seem so personal and individualized that the church became one more commodity.

Thurlow and Jaworkski (2006) note three aspects of discourse that contribute to making it ideological: discourse can constitute identities and relationships, it can represent and reproduce systems of belief and power, and it can establish structures of inequality. The first of these, constituting identities and relationships, is clearly visible on congregational websites. The photos and graphics, associated with verbal text to "promote" various aspects of church life, suggests a personal relationship between the congregation and the website viewer which encourages the viewer to adopt an identity as consumer of a commodity. The viewer is invited into a synthetically personalized relationship promising, often by using photos and graphics, that options are available and that life will be enhanced by pursuing those options. Secondly, the websites represent and reproduce systems of belief through their photos of smiling families and groups of people engaged in worship and their statements of what it means to be a Christian. Most of the photos of individuals and groups on congregational websites portray attractive, middle-class people. In the same way that advertisements encourage the viewer to believe that something about the attractiveness of the person pictured in

the advertisement will transfer to the viewer when he or she purchases the object in the ad, the photos on congregational websites encourage the viewer to believe that some part of the attractiveness of the people pictured on the websites will transfer to the viewer by participating in this congregation. This represents and reproduces systems of belief, not the beliefs about God and the Christian faith that the congregation consciously sets out to affirm, but deeply held cultural beliefs about what constitutes being acceptable and attractive and how to gain those characteristics.

Do these strategies play a part in reproducing systems of power and structures of inequality? The website producers almost certainly would answer, "No." Their hopes and intentions for the websites are optimistic and positive, and many of them expressed their commitment to Christian ministry through the medium of creating or maintaining websites. Several talked about their desire to accurately reflect the nature of the congregation on the websites. The people pictured on the websites appear to be healthy, happy, middle or upper class people, and the only photos of people who appear to be in lower social classes show up in the context of the congregations' service ministries to the poor. Edelman (1984) discusses the language used by the "helping professions" and the way it justifies a power hierarchy (see also Piven & Cloward, 1971). The photos on websites of middle class people participating in congregational life and engaging in service ministry to lower class people arguably justifies the same kind of power hierarchy that Edelman observed. These patterns of social life probably appear natural and normal to many website viewers, and only careful consideration of the photos on the websites raises questions about the societal values that are being reinforced through the visual discourse on the websites.

Further, congregational websites encourage "window shopping." In the same ways that stores display their wares in shop windows, churches promote their pursuits in electronic windows. "Join us for worship!" these electronic windows seem to say or even shout. "Participate in our activities!" and "Embrace our values!" The website producers want to create sites that accurately reflect the identity of the congregation so people will know what to expect when they come to visit. They seem largely unaware

that their ability to accurately reflect the congregation is compromised by their engagement with advertisement media. The intertextual, "parasitic" nature of ads (Cook, 2001, p. 33) means that the use of photos, graphics and vocabulary in ways that resemble advertisements carries associations of consumption, and these associations compromise the very values the congregation desires to promote. It is noteworthy that the megachurches, which use the advertising medium most effectively on their websites, do not mention the common Biblical value "justice" in their verbal text. Consumers don't have time to care about justice. They care about the maintenance of societal patterns that ensure their continued ability to consume (*PR Newswire*, 2007; Samad, 2006). At the same time, it is also important to note that this commodification of religious life that can be seen in the way websites draw on the advertising medium is not unique to congregations or to religion. Education, government, medicine, and other areas of life have also become increasingly commodified in recent years (Myers, 1999; Fairclough, 1989). In this respect, communities of faith have shared in a broader cultural trend in which relationships increasingly are treated as transactions. With this as an ideological backup, I now turn to a presentation of the way the website producers talked about the resources used on the sites.

Semiotic Resources

The Homepage: A Clean and Attractive Lobby

One of the megachurch staff members called the homepage a "virtual front door" that conveyed the congregation's identity and provided links to information about the ministries of the church and contact persons. Another megachurch staff member said, "Our homepage is the introduction, the welcome." The marketing professional who maintained the website for a vibrant liberal/mainline congregation said that the way a church appears on the web, particularly on the homepage, gives a first impression to many people. "It's like cleaning up your lobby," she said, a comment that provided a potential answer to church members who might object to time, money, and effort spent on website design. She designed the site for her own

congregation and then later designed sites for several other congregations. When designing a site for a congregation, she said she looks at the church building, particularly the colors and styles used, and tries to use those same colors and styles on the congregation's home page so that visitors feel comfortable when they attend a worship service. The homepage, she hoped, represented in words, color, and style the unique characteristics of the congregation: "My homepages don't try to convert people, yet it is marketing-driven, trying to present who we are." She said she wants homepages to help people feel welcomed and to communicate warmth, so people can get over any fears. She reflected that there are so many churches, that when homepages accurately reflect the church, they make it possible for people to find a place where they feel comfortable.

An emergent church website producer echoed the same concern for accuracy in representation on the website, as did one of the megachurch website producers, who said, "We're a very laid-back church and we wanted to convey that. We're relaxed, casual, wear your jeans, bring a cup of coffee, with very upbeat music, user friendly, relevant sermons. We want people to be comfortable and at home when they come here, so we want the website to convey who we are." This concern for accuracy obscures the possibility that the presentation of the congregation on the website might play a part in shaping who the congregation is. In recent years communication scholars have focused on the significance of discourse in constructing rather than mirroring reality. For example, Creim (2005) emphasizes the importance of "narrative constructions" in organizations, which can persuade others to adopt viewpoints or to act in certain ways, legitimate group activities and outcomes, create a sense of group distinctiveness, provide norms for behavior, facilitate change by bridging the familiar and the unfamiliar, and establish images of consistency between past, present and future. The website producers did not express any awareness that their communication choices may shape the organization rather than solely reflect it.

Photos and Graphics: Speaking Without Words

One of the megachurch website producers talked about the fact that the site he maintained used numerous photos of people. "People like seeing people," he said. He used stock photos of people that he found in various places on the web. For him, the reason to use photos of people was to give "a community feel." In contrast, one of the emergent website designers used no photos of people in his design of a church site. He said the church leaders felt that a congregation can come across in a certain way because of the people they show on their websites, and these leaders didn't want pictures to represent them or limit the way people perceived them. Instead, they sought to keep their website abstract so people could read the content and draw their own conclusions. The website designer did include photos on the site, though. One of the pages had a large photo at the top of an expanse of water with a bridge crossing the water, going far into the distance. The designer said that the bridge could represent different things to different people, perhaps a journey for one person or the fact that this congregation crosses great distances in their ministry. He said, "I picked pictures for the site not just because they are pretty but because they have a feeling to them, they make a person think for a few minutes." The minister of the same congregation said that one of their strengths is a commitment to the arts, which was reflected on their homepage. "We try to post things that will artistically convey something but that do not appear canned. We chose icons or images that convey something about whatever the activity is about that we are promoting."

The woman who worked in marketing and designed and maintained a vibrant liberal/mainline website talked about a photo of a flower at the top left side of the site. To her, photos of beautiful scenes in nature can communicate Christian values. She said she wanted people to know "there is a place to go for hope and redemption" and she believed photos can convey that message. Because of her background in marketing, she said she can identify high quality photos to use on the site. This presents an interesting contrast. Her background in the advertising medium gave her the skills to identify the kind of photographs that communicate effectively, and she uses that skill to

try to communicate Christian values through visual resources. Her words illustrate another interesting aspect of these interviews. The website producers use images on their websites for many reasons. They are themselves producing a visual object, an assemblage of verbal text and visual resources; the websites they produce could be considered to be a work of art in themselves. They are borrowing, consciously and unconsciously, from hegemonic advertising patterns, but they are doing so much more. Without theological training, they are engaging in theological reflection about their congregations, working deeply and sincerely to try to represent what they consider to be the spiritual depth of their congregations. They are trying to create something attractive, something that will reflect the aspects of the congregation's life that will attract people.

The megachurch website designer who worked full time for the congregation said his goal when adding anything – verbal or visual content – was to make the website "visually pleasing to the eye." He added, "If you want people to visit your site, it has to be visually pleasing. If you're going to stick your money in anything, it's graphics. That's what people see, it's the first impression." In contrast, the website designer who maintained one of the vibrant liberal/mainline sites said they didn't use a lot of images and very few photos of people because "we don't perceive ourselves as being flashy. We want to concentrate on the message. We want website viewers to get interested in what we say and then go further into the website." The use of images on websites is one of the major connections with advertising, and images evoke many associations. All the website producers discussed the intentional choices they made regarding images and their desire to reflect the nature of the congregation and to help viewers feel comfortable or be prompted to think. None of them expressed any concern that the use of images might shape the congregation by constructing reality rather than reflecting it.

Machin (2004) addresses the increasing use of stock photographs in a wide variety of forms of communication, caused by an increased availability of images through online sources such as Getty Images (see also Aiello and Thurlow, 2006).

Machin describes a shift "from emphasis on photography as witness to photography as a symbolic system" (p. 317), a shift that is manifested by an increasing use of decontextualized images with no or little background that represent types rather than specific individuals. These images are sorted in image banks under headings that refer to mental states and core values, so they "symbolically represent marketable concepts and moods such as 'contentment' and 'freedom.' . . . This is therefore an ideologically pre-structured world which is in harmony with consumerism" (p. 316). The comments by website producers indicate that they are well aware of the ability of images to convey moods and values and to engage the viewer: "they make a person think for a few minutes" and "there is a place to go for hope and redemption." Yet only one of the site producers felt uneasy about the possibility that the way images are used in contemporary culture may connect with viewer with an ideology that is in harmony with values that the church may not want to embrace, namely consumerism.

Audio, Video, and Online Community

Several of the producers talked about the importance of using websites to do what other forms of communication, such as newsletters, cannot do. The vibrant liberal/mainline website designer who used very few images and photos viewed the video and audio of the sermon as the heart of the website; indeed, on her website, the video of the sermon was right on the homepage. A megachurch website producer echoed the same commitment and noted that 50% of the traffic on their website came to listen to sermons. Another vibrant liberal/mainline website designer created a video tour of the church building, noting that websites offer an opportunity to liven up photos. The video tour used pans of still photos to create a sense of movement. An emergent church website designer, who had designed sites for several churches, talked about the significance of using websites for online discussion, something that no other means of communication can facilitate. He said, "Churches are really seizing the internet as a place to meet and congregate. The church can be a lot bigger than their location. It's exciting to see they have that kind of vision." Audio, video and online discussion are features that websites can offer, and these features are not available in

printed media. The congregations in this study used their websites for many activities that are not available in printed media: registering for events, giving money, signing up for email newsletters and weekly emails from pastors, accessing databases of staff and congregation members, and links to staff members' email. The website producers were conscious of these opportunities, with producers emphasizing different opportunities presented by the medium.

Verbal Text: Varied Philosophies

Many talked about the relationship between the website and the printed publications of the church. In this area, the interviews confirmed the patterns noted in chapters four and five. The megachurch website producers modified material from other church publications before putting it on the websites. One said that "the words often have to be edited" when taking text from weekly bulletins to put on the website. Another said he takes material from weekly bulletins, cleans it up, shortens it, makes it visually pleasing, and adds graphics. A third megachurch website producer described her process of creating webpages for the various ministries of the congregation. First, the ministry departments of the church supplied her with brochures about their programs. She then talked with them, asking questions about the program, and thereafter created webpages from the brochure, drawing on the priorities discussed in a conversation, and sent it to them for review. She said she changed items from the brochure "to make their material accessible" for website viewers: "I pretty much promote whatever it is and make it accessible for the people who see it." The megachurch site producers frequently expressed their awareness that the website medium requires a different strategy regarding verbal text than print media.

The comments of two of the vibrant liberal/mainline website producers suggested a closer relationship between the congregation's printed material and its website. One posts PDF files of the congregation's newsletters. This strategy is less time consuming than editing all the material for the web, but she acknowledged that there is a problem because newsletters often have many names of individuals, especially children, which may not be appropriate for a website. Another vibrant/liberal

mainline website producer said the publicity committee at the church wanted a similar look across all church publications, including the website. She said that textual content for the website was derived from printed church publications that were developed by the pastoral staff or committees with pastoral staff review. "All information starts out in printed form. The web version is just a copy using a different delivery method." She added, "A lot of churches are making a big mistake trying to be a cnn.com on their website. They're losing the main point of a church website. It's not to be commercial. It's to focus on the spoken word." This was the congregation that had a video of the weekly sermon on the homepage, indicating her commitment to focus on the spoken word.

One of the emergent church website producers reflected on the way announcements are worded on the website. She said they didn't have a list of criteria for making decisions about how to word things, but she did try to consider how the senior pastor would explain things. She tried not to use Christian jargon, and asked herself whether an announcement sounded similar to a typical person on the street. She said that congregational leaders wanted to communicate their church was a place of relationships and that they cared about people's stories: "Wherever you came from, wherever you are right now, we accept you." She also said that congregation leaders were intentional in moving away from forms of communication on paper. They had been trying to encourage congregation members to rely on the website rather than on printed information because of the environmental benefit in reducing use of paper. The emergent church website producers were more likely to create written text for the website without beginning with printed text. They were also more likely to see written text in the context of various forms of online engagement such as discussion groups, their own version of Craig's List, and personal stories by congregation members.

Differences and Similarities

The interviews revealed different strategies in the ways resources are used on the websites, variations that parallel the data presented in chapters four and five. In the area of verbal text, megachurch website producers were most intent on reshaping

written material for the web to make it "accessible" to viewers, and they had the time and resources to do it. Vibrant liberal/mainline website producers were the most tied to printed written material, while the emergent church website producers spoke hardly at all about printed material and appeared to be moving most rapidly to electronic media as their primary means of communication. Numerous similarities in strategy across the three kinds of churches could also be seen in the interviews. With the exception of one vibrant liberal/mainline website designer, who viewed the extensive use of photos as "flashy" and felt photos detracted from the spoken word on the website, the nine other website producers stressed the significance of the visual components. One megachurch website producer emphasized the importance of photos of people to communicate a "community feel," while two others, one from a vibrant liberal/mainline church and one from an emergent church, saw photos as a way to communicate values and to make people think. Many noted that updating photos and graphics took significant time, and yet they felt the need to make their sites visually pleasing in order to attract people to the site. With one exception, they seemed unaware of the potential of generic images to connect the viewer with the consumer culture. Many talked about the unique opportunities that websites provide: audio, video and online discussion are now possible in ways that weren't in the past.

However, one of the most remarkable similarities in the interviews was the lack of any reservations about the possibility of accurately representing congregations on websites. While none of the interviewees used the term "objectivity," they drew on values that have been embraced by journalists in the United States since the 1920s. Schudson (2001) asserts that objectivity as a norm in journalism is peculiarly American and was articulated by journalists in the twentieth century as a way to differentiate journalism from propaganda (see also Wien, 2005; Morris, 2002; Cooper, 1994; for the parallel movement in science see Daston & Galison, 1982). In other countries, journalism as commentary and opinion has been more readily embraced. Because of this influential journalistic emphasis in the United States, Americans may be uniquely poised to believe that accuracy in media presentations is easily attainable and

obviously desirable. It is noteworthy that the congregational websites in this study were produced by such a small number of people in each congregation, and that those people did not appear to be aware that discourse can construct reality as well as represent it. Many of them expressed their intention to accurately reflect the nature of the congregation and none of them questioned their ability to do it.

The Discourse of Online Community

I shift now to a discussion of the unique characteristics of computer-mediated communication that will provide further backdrop for the interviews. Many early researchers, in the 1980s and early 1990s, believed computer-mediated communication was a "cool" medium best suited to the transfer of information and data, but not appropriate for social uses because of the absence of social cues (Herring, 2001; Hine, 2000; Hine, 2005). Because geographic location, social class, race, ethnicity, age and gender are often invisible or considered invisible online, others saw CMC as a utopian, egalitarian harbinger of a new form of democracy which would enable people to relate to each other based on ideas rather than prejudices (Dean, 2000). At this point in the development and study of CMC – the 1980s and early 1990s – very few religious leaders had any interest in the subject. Email was viewed primarily as a means of information exchange for academics, and the development of online discussion groups and their potential for creating religious community was largely invisible to religious leaders.

"Stickiness" and Online Relationships

Hine (2005) notes that a second phase of CMC research began to claim the internet as a cultural context. The term "virtual community" became commonplace in part because of a 1993 book by Rheingold. The scholarly literature in the 1990s about online groups tended to focus on autobiographical accounts of life online or arguments about whether community online is real or in danger of affecting offline communities (Baym, 2000). A key event was the 1997 Supreme Court decision overturning the Communications Decency Act, which precipitated a third phase of the development of

CMC. Now computer-mediated interaction could grow into commercial ventures, and community came to be viewed as a way to increase the "stickiness" of websites. "Community, in other words, could be converted into capital" (Dean, 2000, p. 14). It is ironic that religious organizations began to become interested in the potential benefits offered by the web at roughly the same time that websites were given legal permission to become commercial ventures. Thus, commerce and commodification were beginning to rise in significance in website design and philosophy as churches were beginning to explore what websites could contribute to congregational ministry. Issues of "stickiness" related to advertising and selling may have influenced church website design from the earliest days.

The question of the relationship between online and offline communication is deeply serious to those who study CMC in religious settings. Religious pollster George Barna noted in 1998 that the challenge facing Christian leaders was not how to stop new forms of electronic church, but to ensure that new forms remain tied to foundational theology and principles (cited in Campbell, 2003a). Christians have been divided in their view of electronic spirituality, with some seeing the web as a place of opportunity for the church, a place where proclamation and explanation can take place, an effective means of evangelization of the world. Others view the internet as a dehumanizing force, a threat to community and communication, a modern day Tower of Babel where humans are their own gods (Bazin and Cottin, 2003). Campbell (2003a; see also Campbell, 2005) uses the term "critical friends" (p. 216) to describe the school of thinking that advocates careful reflection about online religious community as the appropriate approach, embracing technology with caution and discernment. This ambivalence about the place of CMC in Christian life was not visible in the opinions of the website producers interviewed for this study. They all believed strongly that websites offer a positive opportunity for congregations. The "critical friend" model advocated by Campbell seemed absent in the churches represented by the interviews – the website producers were enthusiastic friends, and they didn't describe any input

from or interactions with people who gave them any critical perspectives on the website medium.

Several website producers mentioned that their senior pastors, or the other pastors at the church, participated enthusiastically in creating printed material about the church's ministries, but didn't spend any effort considering how to describe the church's ministries on the website. One vibrant liberal/mainline website producer reflected about her church's pastors, "Their whole life is in print. That's all they know as a church." One of the megachurch interviewees noted that the senior pastor did not even have a computer. One of the vibrant liberal/mainline website producers mentioned that her senior pastor had begun to show enthusiasm for the website for two reasons. First, the sermons were archived on the site, which allowed him to retrieve old sermons easily. Secondly, at new members' classes he had begun to notice that an increasing number of people mentioned they found the church through the website. Another website producer said that the senior pastor was gaining enthusiasm for the website because it seemed to be attracting new people to the church. This functional approach to communication strategies seems to be common throughout Christian history. If a communication strategy works to attract new people, then it must be a good idea.

Facilitating Connections

Campbell (2003b) uses another term, "spiritual networking" (p. 192), to look at the ways relationships in online religious settings are knit together in social-spiritual dimensions. Campbell's (2003b, 2005) research indicates that the increase of online religious communication is not causing people to abandon their places of worship. Most people she interviewed saw online connections as supplemental to their involvement in their local church, filling in gaps in teaching, ministry, and community experience. One member described his/her online community as a companion parish, and another participant said that online religious communications had been valuable for her self-esteem because she was able to interact around her ideas without her clothes or mannerisms making a difference. Campbell also found that people join online communities most often to make up for relationships that are lacking in the offline

church (see also Larsen, 2004). Because religious leaders have been slow to embrace CMC, most of the online religious communities Campbell studied were entirely separate from congregations. In the few years since she collected her data, congregations, particularly emergent congregations, have begun to view web-based forums, discussion groups and bulletin boards as a welcome supplement to face-to-face congregational life.

The emergent church website producers expressed their awareness of the challenges of creating online opportunities to complement face-to-face interaction. The woman who works in an emergent church in several roles including website design, talked about the fact that congregational leaders frequently discussed issues related to community, but seldom addressed the ways that online communication could contribute. Her congregation's website appeared to have significant opportunities for online connections, but she saw those opportunities as quite limited: a place to sign up for an email list and electronic newsletters with talking points about the sermon and a way to send email questions. The website designer for the other emergent church noted that the website offers member log in, online forms to sign up for events and be notified of events, and an online discussion forum for members to post and non-members to see. The pastor of that congregation reflected on the fact that online community requires an adoption period. He said that online prayer requests were not commonly used by people in his congregation, but that he gets prayer requests from around the world because of the website. Some forms of online communication were readily adopted in his congregation, such as the marketplace modeled on Craig's List, which was heavily used almost from the start by congregation members, which may reflect the comfort many Americans experience engaging in commercial transactions. That congregation's website was set up with the ability to comment on upcoming events and to continue discussion from sermons and small groups, and congregation members were slowly engaging with these forms of online community. These comments about the slow adoption period for forms of online interaction raise the possibility that the numerous emergent churches that feature polls, chat and forums on

their websites may be aiming for the appearance of dialogicality as a rhetorical move. They may desire to encourage website viewers to perceive their congregations as welcoming to diverse voices, whether or not website visitors actually engage very significantly with these options. Indeed, the technological features of the internet facilitate such a rhetorical move.

As shown in the previous two chapters, the megachurches were highly skilled at enabling people to engage with the ministry of the church through their website. Links on the websites provided information and contacts for a multitude of opportunities for connection, such as support groups, Bible studies, classes, and service opportunities. In describing the content on the homepage, the megachurch website producer who works 30 hours per week for the congregation said that the priority was to present the activities for the major groups within the church, such as the men, women, children, and high school students. The full-time megachurch website producer said that the events to which the website extends an invitation are "fellowship based," which enable people to get help and support. For the megachurch website producers, the concept of community was centered in face-to-face interactions among church members and attenders. The purpose of the website was to promote activities that would get people in the door so they could meet others and receive from them and from God what they need. The woman who headed up a communications team at a megachurch said they typically put announcements on their homepage that relate the church community as whole and that will serve a large number of people. She saw her work as her form of ministry, and she expressed her dependence on others in her church to do other parts of the ministry: "I feel absolutely convinced that advertising is my form of witnessing. I can provide a tool to help them want to come to church and others who are more knowledgeable can tell them about Christ. Once they're in the door, God takes care of the rest." This noteworthy statement reveals an integration of a core value and practice of the Christian faith – witnessing – with a core strategy of the capitalistic economic system – advertising. The casual integration of these two practices, based in two such

different belief systems, creates one of the significant challenges for the church today (Barger, 2005).

In contrast with the megachurches, the vibrant liberal/mainline website producers were more likely to talk about community as residing both in the congregation and in the neighborhood around the church. One of the vibrant liberal/mainline interviewees said, "We try to balance on the site a concern for internal community and outside service to the community around us." A website producer from another vibrant liberal/mainline congregation noted that there was a large organ installed in a nearby church. Some of the people from her church were involved in helping to install it, so she created a photo journal of the organ installation for her congregation's website. In addition, her pastor asked her to put links on the homepage to the local art museum and nearby school. She reflected, "We are good neighbors. We try to be good community citizens doing the right thing." She expressed her concern, though, about the possibility that online relationships may replace face-to-face interactions. She wondered if that's the direction the church is heading, and she said, "In no way do I think a website can replace a congregation." Despite her reservations, she expressed her commitment to websites as a way to nurture congregational life. She said a website can help someone who is homebound to keep them connected to the congregation and connected to God. She said, "A church should have a web ministry. I would love if someone was in pain and could contact someone online. Our technology has created isolation. Our youth have their own section of the website and they can talk to each other on it. They have set up a blog site." Even in these comments, however, she was concerned about the possibility that a congregation's online community might stray onto topics that have nothing to do with Christianity. She said, "That raises a whole set of other questions – how can we limit our discussions to things of faith?"

The concept of community was used by website producers in all three types of churches as a semiotic resource, and they used this concept somewhat differently. On the megachurch sites, the community was the congregation, and the job of website producers was to create advertising campaigns to get people through the door so they

would be able to find the relationships they needed. Online opportunities for connection in the megachurches usually involved signups for email newsletters or weekly emails from pastors. In the vibrant liberal/mainline churches, the community resided both in the congregation and the neighborhood, and the website producers wanted to create sites that would help people to engage in both. These websites tended to present a positive view, in pictures and in words, of engagement with both the congregation's activities and activities in the surrounding area. In the emergent churches, the notion of community resided in relationships that might be face-to-face or might be online. The three types of congregations described their goals related to community differently, and those differences were apparent both in the content analysis and in the interviews.

In spite of the differences in the way the concept of community was described by the three kinds of churches, the concept functioned in a similar way on all three kinds of websites, as a discursive appeal, drawing on deeply held archetypal ideas about personal connections and human relationships. Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic (2004) point out the fact that different people bring significantly different expectations to the concept of community; these associations of "community" with various forms of human relationships probably come from a variety of previous experiences. On all the websites, "community" was used positively, as if it is self-evident that community is something good and helpful that should be sought after. Even the emergent church websites, which discussed community in the theological context of the nature of God, gave very few definitions or specific indications of the presuppositions they are bringing to their discussion of community. In that way "community" is like "family," an "ultimate term" (Weaver, 1953), used to invoke something that is assumed to be positive and good. All three kinds of congregational websites used "community" in this way, to some extent at least. While the megachurches were most likely to make reference to "family" to appeal to archetypal notions of good relationships, the emergent churches were most likely to use "community" to accomplish the same end.

Conclusion: More Portraits

This chapter centered around critical textual analysis, drawing on the theories of semiotics and social semiotics. The patterns that emerged through content analysis and rhetorical analysis were considered again, with the addition of data from the interviews. The goal was to consider the links between the semiotic strategies used and the political-cultural economy of the congregations studied, including the power relations which frame the practices of congregational branding. This analysis resulted in further portraits of the congregations. In chapter four I used the metaphor of lenses to describe the way the congregations presented themselves: the megachurches as mirrors, the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations as windows, and the emergent churches as cameras. In chapter five, I presented portraits of the three kinds of congregations. The megachurches present themselves on their websites as busy, active families; the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations as nurturant parents; and the emergent churches as trendy coffeehouses. After undertaking the interviews with website producers, those portraits remain, but additional portraits have become clear to me. This new set of portraits draws on images of enterprise and consumption and comes from an understanding of websites as participating in the advertising genre. In this set of portraits, all three churches find their place at a mall.

The megachurches take the form on their websites of a large anchor store, such as a department store or a Wal-Mart. They offer something for everyone. It appears that almost every desire and need can be met because so many options are available. These options are presented on the websites using synthetic personalization, which makes the viewer feel that he or she has been addressed in a personal way. Perhaps unintentionally, the viewer is treated like a consumer of the variety of goods in the store. The success of the megachurches in attracting members is not surprising if their websites have similarities to a Wal-Mart store. A Pew Center study (2005) found that 84% of Americans had shopped at a Wal-Mart store in the previous year and half of these said they had done so regularly. Solid majorities felt that Wal-Mart was a good place for their family to shop and was good for their community and the country. The

megachurches reflect the consumer culture, and consumption is viewed by many Americans as a good thing for all.

The emergent churches, in contrast, present themselves as art galleries. Through their emphasis on authentic community and deep theological reflection, they encourage the viewer to make an investment in a major purchase, something that will reflect the viewer's identity and that will endure longer than the shoes, kitchen utensils or shampoo purchased at Wal-Mart. These art galleries aren't cluttered with small items, and there are not as many displays to encourage last-minute impulse shopping. The kind of consumption encouraged here is intentional, with reflection on personal authenticity, artistic excellence, and culturally diverse creativity. A purchase at this art gallery will have relational implications because connections will be established with the curator of the gallery and with others who value the kind of art displayed here. The curators would shudder at the idea that the gallery has anything in common with a Wal-Mart store, because they consider shopping for art to be a deep, thoughtful, and humanizing endeavor. However, all shopping is nonetheless a form of consumption, and both the Wal-Mart and the gallery use sophisticated advertisements to get people through their doors. Despite its great differences from Wal-Mart, this gallery still finds its place at the local mall.[120]

In another contrast, the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations appear on their websites as protest marches or peace rallies. These rallies are being held on the sidewalk outside the mall, but the protest organizers direct people to a small counter-cultural shop inside the mall where they can purchase peace banners, justice buttons, and environmental bumper stickers. In addition, some enterprising folks have set up a stand near the rally site to sell those same items. The organizers of the rally are recruiting people to join in and add their voices to the fight for inclusive values, and they have used a series of advertisements to get people to attend the rally. The focus of the advertisements and the rally is on finding one's voice and adding that voice to the

[120] I am indebted to Satina Smith in a personal conversation for the idea of portraying megachurches as department stores and emergent churches as art galleries.

cause of promoting peace, justice, and ecological sustainability. In the same way that the gallery owners refuse to acknowledge that their endeavor bears any relation to Wal-Mart's goals, the protest organizers would be aghast at the suggestion that they have anything in common with either the gallery or the big box store. They would say that they are not encouraging consumption at all; indeed, they are fighting it. Yet they are holding their rally at a mall, they are selling accoutrements of protest, and they are recruiting people for their cause with sophisticated advertisements.

These portraits affirm that congregational websites encourage consumption. Different segments of the American population may have positive or negative reactions to Wal-Marts, art galleries, or protest marches, and the comparison of the congregational websites to these three kinds of commercial activities are not intended to indicate that one of them is inherently better than another. At the same time, however, the comparisons *are* intended to highlight the congruent patterns of consumerism presented in the websites. By using the medium of advertising, they position the viewer to "buy" the wares offered by the congregation. They encourage congregations, and by extension the Christian faith itself, to be viewed as commodities, whether intentionally or not. Social semioticians argue that many forms of economic, social and political life have become semioticized, "dependent on symbolism, imagery and design" and engaged with "the promotion of ideals, images and lifestyle" (Aiello & Thurlow, 2006, p. 149; see also Lash & Urry, 1994). We have seen this pattern of semiotization on congregational websites. Symbolism, imagery and design are paramount in the considerations of nine of the ten website producers. Several of the website producers frequently used the word "promote" or related concepts when they discussed their purpose. "Ideals, images and lifestyle" are readily visible on the homepages, and often on the other web pages as well, for most of the congregations studied. The website producers were clear that their goal was to faithfully and accurately represent the congregation, and the ideals, images and lifestyles presented on the pages of the websites were chosen for the purpose of conveying an accurate

representation. Any form of manipulation would have been distasteful to them. Their sincerity and desire to serve with integrity were clear in the interviews.

Yet in most cases these website producers did their work of representing the congregation alone. Several of the site producers said that the pastor or pastors trusted them to make good decisions for the site. The hands-off attitude and lack of engagement of many senior pastors contributes to the problematic nature of the website as an accurate and objective representation of the congregation. Pastors may have been writing text for announcements or brochures, and that text may have been used on the site as a reflection of the priorities of the pastoral staff of the congregation. However, websites are so much more than verbal text. In fact, the verbal text is often the last aspect of a website to be absorbed by viewers. Photos, graphics, links, and the overall feel of the homepage are much more significant in communicating the identity of the congregation. The website designer who studied the colors and shapes of the church building and tried to mirror them on the homepage was attempting to engage visually with the reality of the congregation's identity, but the identity of a congregation resides in much more than the building. The question of accurate representation of the congregation on a website is complex and challenging, and the website producers seemed largely unaware of the complexity. The absence of "critical friends" may be part of the reason why website producers ignored the commodification and consumerism inherent in the application of the advertising medium to congregational websites, and why they were equally unaware of the possibility that discourse may create reality as well as represent it. They need to hear voices that help them think critically about the challenges of the electronic medium they embrace so enthusiastically.

Chapter Seven
The Websites and the Congregations

I began this dissertation with a set of questions in mind that stand behind the specific research undertaken in this study. I am a minister in a mainline denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and I have served in pastoral roles in both evangelical and liberal congregations within that denomination. At times I feel at home in both settings, and at other times I feel uncomfortable in both settings. I can see clearly some of the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches to the Christian faith. I can also see the inherent flaws in describing Christianity in terms of a liberal-conservative binary, a perspective which is highlighted so frequently by the media and examined so often in quantitative research on religion. I know I don't fit easily into one of the two categories, and I saw the same phenomenon in the churches where I served (see Bass, 2004, 2005, and 2006, who also describes the limits of this binary). In the liberal congregation, I was surprised to find individuals who were enthusiastic about conservative Christian talk radio. In the evangelical congregation, numerous individuals were as socially progressive as is possible. I wondered if my research might suggest a complexity to the American Christian landscape, and it did. I also wondered why evangelical megachurches are so popular with such large numbers of people, in what ways emergent churches are speaking to the younger generations, and what characteristics of some liberal churches keep them from declining in membership. I wondered what future directions for American Protestant Christianity might be revealed by the patterns of ministry at these three kinds of churches. The joy of this study for me was the opportunity to explore those issues.

Other questions that influenced this dissertation arose from my experience overseeing congregational communications from 1997 to 2004 as a part of my role as associate pastor in a thriving Presbyterian congregation. I had done desktop publishing professionally in the early and mid-1990s, so in my new role as associate pastor I dove into the production of brochures and newsletters, paying careful attention to the words

and look of each publication. In 1998 and 1999, some members of the congregation began talking about having a congregational website. I was not particularly interested at first, but, wanting to encourage lay leadership, I gave them token support. They obtained a URL, and a volunteer designed a site. For the first year or two, I seldom looked at the site. Another volunteer redesigned the site in the early 2000s, and began asking for advice from me more frequently. By the time I left that church in 2004, I was beginning to gain some enthusiasm for the positive online opportunities for congregations. When I began to plan this dissertation, it quickly became clear that congregational communication with both newcomers and members was moving off paper and onto the web, and that websites were becoming a principal medium for expressing organizational identity. Congregational identity was my first interest, and I decided to study persuasion as well because so many aspects of identity are revealed through the ways persuasion is exercised. When I began this study I had no idea of the variety of things that churches were doing on their websites. I didn't know they were using websites to sign people up for activities, to enable online donations, to sell religious books and CDs, to connect viewers to so many denominations and community organizations, to advertise blood drives and motorcycle fellowships and a host of other unexpected activities. A second joy of this study has been to immerse myself in the issues related to the website medium, and begin to see more of the possibilities for congregations as they use websites. In this concluding chapter, I begin my summary of this study by discussing the value of a communication perspective on these matters. I then turn to a focus on the website medium and I summarize my findings in that area. Then I consider the congregations themselves and what can be said about them from this study of their websites.

Communication and the Website Medium

In the words of renown communication scholar James Carey, "To study communication is to examine the actual social process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended, and used" (1988, p. 30). Carey is one of many

communication scholars who discuss the limitations of the traditional sender-receiver model of communication and who observe the movement within communication studies toward an understanding of the significance of the social, cultural, and constitutive aspects of texts (Hall, 2001; Craig, 2001). This study of websites created by Christian congregations draws on these aspects of contemporary communication studies, affirming the cultural processes that lie behind the symbolic representation of the congregations on the websites, as well as the social realities that may be nurtured within the congregation by the sites. This study has also raised questions about the constitutive nature of congregational websites: Do the sites create aspects of congregational identity as well as reflect them? And do pastors, congregational leaders, and website producers take that possibility into account as they create the sites? The language of ritual, used by Carey to describe the communication process, emphasizes the "maintenance of society in time . . .; not the act of imparting information or influence but the creation, representation, and celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs" (p. 43). This study showed many ways the shared beliefs within congregations are created, represented, and celebrated on websites through the strategic use of visual and verbal resources.

Traditional communication studies have focused on various "levels" of communication: interpersonal, small group, organizational, and mass media (Craig, 2001, p. 133). Congregational websites are compelling objects of study because all of these levels are invoked at different times, as follows: The activities of the congregations, promoted through announcements, photos, graphics, and links, are often designed to encourage interpersonal or small group communication, and this study has examined some of the language and photos that promote such relationships. The congregational websites represent organizations, so they engage significantly with communication studies on that level. All websites have a mass media component to them, because they are accessible to large groups of people. As websites have become more popular in recent years, and as communication scholars have begun to study them, a variety of research methods have been adapted in order to address some of the

complexity of the issues raised by websites. Schneider and Foot (2004) note three primary kinds of analysis used to study websites: discursive or rhetorical analyses, which focus primarily on content; structure or feature analyses, which focus on the structure of the sites, including the links; and sociocultural analyses, which emphasize hyperlink relationality and create new strategies for media ethnography in "virtual space." This study has drawn primarily on the first two of these methods, focusing largely on the sites as texts with an additional emphasis on the links, which highlight the ways the structure of the sites reveal congregational identity and allow the congregations to exercise persuasion. However, the interviews with website producers are related in part to Schneider and Foot's third kind of analysis because the interviews situate the sites in specific communities with their unique social practices, providing sociocultural insights related to the production of the websites.

Schneider and Foot (2004) also note that the web is a unique mixture of the permanent and the ephemeral. Websites have permanent aspects to them; the content must exist in a permanent form in order to be posted on a website, and website viewers can archive text from a site through a variety of means. Yet websites are also ephemeral in two ways. First, website content is transitory and can be changed frequently. In addition, websites in many ways resemble television, radio, theater, and particularly films (Manovich, 2002), media that are ephemeral in construction because they are more like performances than documents. Thus, Goffman's (1959) view of communication as performative provides yet another insight from communication studies that undergirds this analysis. Congregational websites in themselves are performative, a carefully choreographed assemblage of words, photos, graphics, and links. Some of the components of congregational websites are performative in themselves as well. The photos of worship services and other congregational activities, as well as the videos posted on sites, work effectively as performances or rituals because the viewers of the photos can read themselves into the activities pictured.

This study makes a contribution to the field of communication studies in several ways. Studies of organizational websites are still few in number, so this

research will stand as one of the early studies in this area. The methods used in this study – content analysis, rhetorical analysis, and critical analysis drawing on social semiotics – have been adapted from their traditional settings for the purpose of examining websites, something that has not been done frequently. The findings of the study – including the use of imperative verbs and photos with direct address, the invocation of the metaphor of family and the coffee house milieu, the relative autonomy of the website producers, and their embrace of the advertising medium – will be of interest to scholars who study congregations as well as those who study web communication. This research is grounded in many of the newer theories and methods in the field of communication studies, illustrating their use in an effective manner and reporting findings that have significance both in religious studies and communication studies. In short, this research has sought to be interdisciplinary in the best sense of the traditions of communication scholarship.

A Return to the Concepts that Undergird This Study

The conceptual framework for this study focused on three main areas: organizational identity and community, the rhetoric of the web, and social semiotics. In this section I summarize the findings of this study in those three areas, focusing particularly on the connections between the conceptual framework for the study and the website medium, while acknowledging the overlap between these three areas of conceptual focus. In the area of organizational identity, the content analysis looked for key words on homepages, in material for newcomers, in mission statements, and in frequently asked questions, as well as the kinds and numbers of photos, graphics, and links on the homepage. Under the umbrella topic of the rhetoric of the web, persuasion in many forms was examined both through content analysis and rhetorical analysis: links, metaphors, photos, imperative verbs, photos of people in "demand" versus "offer" mode. These analyses contributed to an understanding of the identity of the three kinds of congregations. The rhetorical concept heteroglossia, from the work of Bakhtin, contributed additional insights about the congregations' identities. The issues of social semiotics were explored most directly through the interviews with the website

producers which place the websites in their context and give insights about why and how the websites were created. However, issues related to social semiotics are also apparent in the content analysis and rhetorical analysis chapters, because those chapters so thoroughly document and describe the semiotic resources used on the sites. I begin by focusing on organizational identity as represented by website characteristics.

Organizational Identity, Community, and Website Characteristics

In chapter two I stated my intention to use a definition of organizational identity proposed by Leuthesser and Kohli (1997): "the way in which an organization reveals its philosophy and strategy through communication, behavior and symbolism" (p. 59). Earlier definitions of organizational identity emphasized an organization's values based in its history and the aspects of an organization's character which are central, enduring, and distinctive, and the phrase in the Leuthesser and Kohli definition, "philosophy and strategy," provides a good summary of those broad concepts. The phrase "communication, behavior and symbolism" emphasizes that an organization's identity is not simply self-evident, but that it is communicated in its actions and its use of symbols, some of which may be intentional and some of which may be unintentional. As we have entered an information age, it has become apparent that an organization's communication, behavior and symbolism contribute to the shaping of an organization's identity in addition to reflecting it. The congregations in this study presented their identities on their websites in part through their use of mission statements. The majority of the congregations had a mission statement of some sort on their website, with 90% of the vibrant liberal/mainline churches posting mission statements in some form on their homepage, while only 65% of emergent churches and 40% of megachurches did so. Some statements reflecting congregation mission were very brief, only a few words long, while others were several sentences. In some cases, a congregation used numerous statements of purpose or vision that could be viewed as mission statements, placed on various web pages. In other cases, particularly in the vibrant liberal/mainline churches, the mission statement was clearly labeled and was

the only statement anywhere on the website that explicitly communicated vision or purpose.

The high percentage of vibrant liberal/mainline churches that presented mission statements on their homepage is indicative of the connection commonly found on vibrant liberal/mainline websites to verbal print media. This connection was highlighted several times in this study. Megachurches and emergent churches that did not have mission statements on their homepage were communicating their congregational identity through other means than explicit verbal statements. The megachurches included many more photos of people than the other two types of churches, and they presented more headshots. This high number of photos of people corresponds with the assessment I have made that they portray themselves on their websites as busy, active families. The megachurches also used more nature photos than the other kinds of churches, expressing some aspect of their identity as connected to nature in a way that is not entirely clear. Perhaps they were trying to communicate peace and serenity or their connection to God as creator. The megachurches also communicated their identity through their links. They had more links explicitly for newcomers and more links to FAQs, small groups, classes and seminars, and opportunities for service than the other two types of churches. These links communicated significant aspects of their identity: they are congregations that attempt to welcome and enfold newcomers, they value small group relationships, and they want to help people engage in learning and service opportunities. The megachurch sites contained half again as many imperative verbs on their homepages as emergent churches, and more than double the number found on vibrant liberal/mainline homepages. These imperative verbs convey another aspect of the identity presented by the megachurches. They are directive; they want people to become engaged in various aspects of congregational life, and they use verbal imperatives to encourage people to join in. The megachurches also had the most links on their homepage to a statement of faith, indicating their identity as being more closely connected to a specific belief system than the other two types of churches. They used slideshows and

audio/video/podcast most often on their websites, confirming their identity as large organizations with commensurately large budgets which can offer the latest technologies. Finally, the ratio of internal links to outlinks was much higher for megachurches than the other two types of churches. All of these modes of communication present megachurches as self-sufficient communities of faith.

In contrast, the vibrant liberal/mainline church websites, through their links and graphics, conveyed their congregations' identities as connected to their denominations and local communities. They presented denominational graphics and photos of their church buildings the most often. They were the least likely to have imperative verbs, to have links for newcomers and links to small groups, and to have a link on their homepage to a statement of faith. They were most likely to use "inclusive," a word that was often used in the mission statements commonly present on their homepages. These characteristics indicate the nature of the inclusive welcome offered by the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations on their websites. They don't want to force people to do or believe specific things; their welcome is more nondirective than that of the megachurches. They were second after the megachurches to have links to educational opportunities, and many of the classes and seminars offered in vibrant liberal/mainline churches explored the Christian faith while drawing on other religious traditions. In addition, the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations had a significant connection to the arts. They had more links to music than the other two kinds of congregations, and they had more links to the arts than the megachurches. While the emergent churches talked about the arts most frequently in their mission statements, the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations also frequently expressed a concern for the arts. Often their connection to their local community came in the form of support for arts groups. The vibrant liberal mainline sites also discussed justice the most often. All of these characteristics convey the identity of these congregations, as presented on their websites, as inclusive, nondirective, with the arts and justice as priorities.

The emergent church sites discussed connections and relationships the most. Their websites contained the words "seeker" and "authentic" the most, and were the

most likely to express their openness to questions. They were second after the megachurches in links to small groups, and they were most likely to link to various forms of online community, such as blogs, polls, and online forums. These characteristics indicate the close connection between the identity of these congregations and their commitment to authentic community that welcomes seekers and encourages people to live with questions. This kind of community was connected to the latest communication technology in a way that was not found in the other kinds of churches. Emergent church websites referenced historic Christianity the most often, expressing their commitment to an identity rooted in Christian history. They had the most links to the arts, and they talked about the arts much more frequently in connection with their mission than the other two types of churches; in fact, they grounded their commitment to the arts in theological principles in a way that almost never occurred on the other two types of church websites. The emergent churches were second after the vibrant liberal/mainline churches in their use of the word "justice," and they were most likely to mention service to the poor. The organizational identity of emergent churches as portrayed by their websites is distinctly different than the other two types of churches, with less central control and more emphasis on justice than the megachurches, more pathways to engagement than the vibrant liberal/mainline churches, and more emphasis on community than both of the other two kinds of churches.

These churches revealed and constructed their identities through their mission statements, announcements of events, and encouragements to engage with the congregation. The way they used words on their websites was similar to the their use of words in other church publications, with the insight from several of the website producers that verbal texts from other publications are often tightened up for use on the web. Photographs can be used on websites in large numbers in a way that is not possible in print media, and photographs communicate significant components of an organization's identity. Other aspects of identity portrayal on websites are unique to the website medium. Audio, video and podcast brings the spoken word directly to the

website viewer in a way that has similarities with radio and TV yet differs in that a website viewer can choose the time and place to listen or watch, and also can choose the sequence of listening and watching. The congregation's identity as presented in sermons and other presentations can be accessed directly by the website viewer. The choice of links and their positioning on the web page communicate significant things about the values of a congregation in a way that has faint parallels in tables of contents or lists of resources in print media. However the significance of links as a new way to communicate aspects of organizational identity is important to recognize. The presence of opportunities for viewers to express their opinion in online polls and discussion forums also suggests something about a congregation's identity as a place where diverse voices are welcome. The ability to register for events, give money online, and purchase books, CDs and other things was not a focus of this study, but it must be noted that these options also communicate aspects of organizational identity by bringing to the forefront the actions that website producers and congregational leaders want to encourage from viewers. All of these website characteristics contribute to the communication of an organization's identity and merit considerable attention as congregations and online communications continue to evolve.

The Rhetoric of the Web

The second area of theoretic focus of this study is rhetoric, which considers issues of persuasion, and scholars who study the rhetoric of the web look at multiple ways a website can exercise persuasion. In the previous paragraphs, I noted several of the ways congregational websites exercise persuasion through links, imperative verbs, and the ways photographs are used. Interactivity is often identified as one of the significant ways persuasion is exercised on websites. Some scholars note two kinds of interactivity (Massey and Levy, 1999; Stromer-Galley, 2004). "Interactivity-as-process" or interpersonal interactivity on websites is parallel to personal face-to-face relationships. Congregational websites engage in this kind of interactivity most commonly through providing email links to staff members, and emergent churches use it in online forums and other opportunities for viewers to respond to the website with

their voices and opinions. The second form of interactivity, "interactivity-as-product" or content interactivity, happens when a set of technological features allows users to interact with the interface or system itself, for example clicking on a hyperlink to download an audio presentation or to move to another page. These kinds of interactivity communicate aspects of an organization's identity because they express the priorities of the organization. Each choice to put a link on a web page is a choice not to put another link in that same place, and these choices communicate values. The accumulation of such choices, the patterns in those choices, communicates an organization's values even more strongly. The many links on the megachurch sites to opportunities for engagement in small groups and service opportunities, the many links on the vibrant liberal/mainline sites to denominational resources, and the many links on emergent sites to virtual community parallel the stated values of these congregations, and thus reinforce the identity of the congregations as communicated on their websites.

Interactivity-as-process and coproductive interactivity (Xenos and Foot, in press) both have connections with the concept of heteroglossia, that balance point between unitary and diverse forces. Unitary forces are represented on congregational websites by photos of church buildings and ministers in robes, statements of faith, and words about the Bible, Jesus and truth, and these unitary voices are essential in order to have a central, unifying focus for congregational life. On the other side of the spectrum, diverse voices on congregational websites come through the posting of personal stories, photo galleries that show congregation members in action, lengthy announcements that convey some of the intent of the event planner (the "novel" that lies behind the event), and art galleries that show the work of congregation members. Interpersonal interactivity in the form of online polls or discussion forums also contributes a place for diverse voices to be heard. This balance point between unitary and diverse voices that Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossia is essential for congregations to navigate because it parallels the Biblical priority of one faith coupled with multiple gifts, diverse ways to serve, and a variety of actions (I Corinthians 12:4-6). This balance point will continue to be significant for congregations, as pluralism and

secularism compete with the central message of the Christian faith, and as cultural diversity at times verges on chaos.

All three kinds of churches expressed the centrality of the Christian faith in one way or another on their websites. The megachurch sites contained statements of faith most frequently, the vibrant liberal/mainline sites referenced Jesus most frequently and based their inclusive welcome on biblical values, and the emergent sites grounded many of their priorities, particularly the arts and community, in Christian theological principles. All three kinds of churches expressed a commitment to diversity: the megachurches in their invitations to so many forms of service, learning, and group activities; the vibrant liberal/mainline churches in their verbal, and sometime visual, affirmation of inclusion and diversity; and the emergent churches in their more extensive use of interpersonal interactivity and in their language about the kind of community they hoped to develop. Therefore, all three kinds of congregational websites create a healthy tension point between unity and diversity. The analysis of the websites indicated that the megachurches appear on first glance to affirm diversity more than they actually do, because their websites make such good use of diverse graphics. Yet on closer analysis they have a strong unitary voice. In contrast, the vibrant liberal/mainline churches appear on first glance to affirm diversity less than they actually do, because their websites appear more traditional and connected to print media and traditional sources of authority like ministers and buildings. On closer analysis they have a strong commitment to diversity.

This discussion about heteroglossia focuses on the resources used on the websites, arguing that all churches attempt to find a balance point between unity and diversity, between voices that draw the viewer towards a single unitary view of reality and other voices that express diversity and multiplicity. The structure of websites echoes this tension. Websites are based in precise, detailed digital technology. Links provide connections to URLs, which must be written correctly in every detail. Websites can be structured like databases, with information that is entered in one place programmed to appear in several other places. Yet this precise and concrete technology

can be used in wildly creative ways, and congregational website producers employ a variety of colors, fonts, styles, graphics, and photos, as well as words, to try to communicate the essence of their congregations. Unity in diversity, and diversity in unity, are written into both the structure of websites and the life of the congregations represented on the sites. Finding this balance point is one of the central challenges for congregations, and perhaps for all kinds of organizations, as they consider the design of their websites and their choices of verbal and visual resources for the sites. Congregations need to provide a space for the authentic voices of members while affirming the central purpose and identity of the congregation.

Scholars who study the rhetoric of the web also examine the use of traditional tropes such as metaphor, synecdoche, and hypberbole. Burbules (1998) suggests that links be viewed as metaphors, where meaning is transferred from one idea to another, and synecdoche, where the particular stands for the general. The frequent use of the family metaphor on the Saddleback Community Church website, in photos and in verbal text, carries over into the links as well. The links to small groups, classes and service opportunities could be viewed as the means by which people engage with this family of faith. In fact, since so many of the megachurch websites seem to convey the sense of being busy, bustling families, the links they employ to the "family" activities could be viewed as metaphors. Many of the megachurch websites used links in the form of graphics, and the graphics seemed to communicate something about the activity they were describing. In that sense the links use synecdoche; a particular graphic stands for the general activity. Burbules argues that hyperbole, another trope, is common on the web, and many of these websites do seem to make promises about the nature of congregational life that are hyperbolic. No church of more than 2000 members can be as intimate as a family, yet the megachurches appear to make that promise. No church can include everyone completely, as the vibrant liberal/mainline churches appear to promise. And no church can provide a place for totally authentic relationships, as the emergent churches claim to do. Hyperbole appears to be built into the website medium, as it is perhaps built into the advertising genre upon which

websites draw. The persuasive power of metaphor, synecdoche, and hyperbole, identified for more than 2000 years by scholars of rhetoric, continues in the website medium.

Social Semiotics and Websites

Chapter six laid out the task of social semioticians, to document and catalogue the use of semiotic resources and then to situate the use of those resources in historical, cultural, and institutional contexts. The semiotic resources on congregational websites, which have been documented in many ways in this study – the words, photos, graphics, and links – occur in our present time but in many cases they draw on patterns and issues from the past, a characteristic most evident on the emergent church websites with their evocation of Christian history as a source of authority. These semiotic resources inhabit the American Protestant Christian culture, but they also touch the wider culture because websites are available to be seen by anyone who is interested. They also draw on the wider culture through their embrace of the advertising medium; U.S. viewers of these websites, no matter how deeply committed to the Christian faith they may be, have seen hundreds of thousands of advertisements over their lifespan and they bring memories of those advertisements to their engagement with the websites, whether or not they are conscious of doing so. Congregational websites are situated within the congregations as institutions and organizations, and they represent the identity of those organizations and contribute to the construction of that identity as well. Because the construction and use of websites is so new, and because so many congregational leaders apparently spend little time considering the nature of the websites attached to their congregations, websites are undoubtedly participating in the construction of the identities of congregations in ways that are largely unexpected and unexamined.

Interviews with the website producers revealed insights about the construction of congregational websites. In many cases, the website producers work independently, and the pastors and other congregational leaders trust the website producers to make appropriate choices for the site. Many pastors apparently give cursory attention to the

website, and, when they are involved, they focus most on generating verbal text about the congregation that website producers modify for the site. This raises serious questions about the nature of the representation of many congregations on their websites. So few people are involved in figuring out how to represent a complex organization using a medium that is very new, and equally few people are considering the ways that a congregational website might contribute to the identity formation of the congregation. Another significant issue revealed in the interviews is the deep sincerity of the website producers, several of whom expressed their confidence that by using the very best and latest communication strategies, they are helping to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only one of the website producers was concerned that the congregation might appear to be "slick" if she used too many photos and graphics like advertisements do. The others seemed unaware of the danger of commodification inherent in the advertising medium, including the danger of encouraging "window shopping" for churches.

Questions Raised by Congregations' Use of Websites

As I reflect on the findings of this study, I am left with a significant question about websites: How will we be shaped by our increasing use of websites, in the same kinds of ways that we have been shaped by newspapers, magazines, photography, radio, television, and film? Websites can do so much. They are databases of information used by congregations to provide lists of resources, calendars, and member and staff directories. Websites enable connections to other organizations through links, which go far beyond providing a list of related organizations. Websites enable signups, online forums and discussions, donations, and selling. Hundreds or even thousands of photos can be posted on websites to capture aspects of congregational life. Websites provide opportunities for self-expression by individuals – ministers, congregational leaders, members – through personal homepages and blogs, which have both verbal and visual elements. This study revealed some of the ways websites are advertisements, promoting congregational activities. Action and information are merged on websites in a way unlike any previous medium. In fact, no other

communication medium comes close to doing all that a website can do, and our engagement with this medium is in its infancy. Our study of this medium is also just beginning. How are we changing because of the presence of this medium in our lives? How will we change? And how should Christians view this medium?

Another challenge comes from the connections of the website medium to the advertising medium. The website producers interviewed for this study stand in a long tradition of Christians who embraced the latest communication technologies to promote the Christian faith (Finke and Iannaccone, 1993; Carpenter, 1997; Finke and Stark, 2005; Noll, 2001; Smith, 1998). Beginning with Augustine, who taught principles of classical rhetoric to improve preaching, Christians have welcomed the latest means of communication: the printing press to produce books, pamphlets, and newspapers about the Christian faith; radio and television to broadcast worship services and evangelistic events; and now the web. A new question arises in our time. Are congregational websites, which in most instances draw on secular advertising techniques, somehow different than these earlier communication strategies because of the capitalism and commodification that are so embedded in twentieth and twenty-first century advertising? Or did the strategies of earlier Christians – pilgrimages, almsgiving, indulgences, icons – commodify the church and the Christian faith in their own ways? Are the forms of ideology that create and maintain power structures closer to the surface in discourse today, and thus congregations who employ websites need to be more careful than, say, a medieval preacher who was studying classical rhetoric to help him craft sermons that would motivate people to believe in Jesus Christ? These are the questions that remain in my mind as I read the texts of the interviews in the light of scholars and critics researchers who evaluate advertising.

For Future Study of the Website Medium

One significant area for further study related to the website medium is audience reception of the congregational websites. This study focused on the websites themselves and the website producers, but not on the ways websites are perceived by viewers. Studying the responses of people both inside and outside the congregations

would add richness and depth to this kind of study, and would help to answer the questions of how well a particular congregation's website reflects its members' perception of its identity and whether the website is shaping congregational life as well as representing it. Another area of future study was suggested by one of the website producers, who wondered how much it benefits a congregation to hire professional website designers. Does a professionally designed site attract more visitors? Are larger website budgets correlated with more people becoming members? Staying members? A study of website budget and membership trends, coupled with interviews of website viewers, might reveal some interesting information. Additional study could also be focused on various forms of virtual community, such as polls and discussion boards, examining whether they increase the "stickiness" of congregational websites and whether they have an impact on membership and congregational perceptions of community.

Websites offer fascinating opportunities, and many congregational leaders seem to be largely unaware of the possibilities. The emergent churches are beginning to use online discussion forums as a way to augment their small groups and sermons. More churches are making use of the practical opportunities afforded by websites for signups, contributions and bulletin boards of photos of congregational activities. As I write this conclusion to my dissertation, blogs are exploding as a communication medium for congregational leaders (Bailey, 2007). If I were beginning this study today, I would certainly include much more investigation of blogs by congregational leaders. Pastors and other congregational leaders need to pay attention to these opportunities and challenges presented by this new communication medium instead of leaving the production of congregational sites in the hands of one or two individuals who are comfortable with the tools of production. Based on this study, I conclude that congregational website producers desperately need "critical friends" (Campbell, 2003a, p. 216) who will help them think critically and theologically about the website medium and its close connection to advertising. Pastors and other congregational leaders need to embrace the need for "critical friends" of the website medium. Thus far this chapter

has centered on issues related to websites, the object of analysis of this study. Now I turn to the larger issue, the congregations whose websites were examined, to provide a summary of the results of this study regarding the three kinds of congregations studied. I begin with a summary of some of the theoretical background presented earlier that will provide essential theoretical grounding for this discussion.

The Congregations

Church membership and attendance data from the twentieth century demonstrate the decline of Christian liberalism and the rise of conservative Christianity (Kelly, 1972, 1978; Hunter, 1987; Chaves, Konieczny, & Barman, E., 1999). Numerous viewpoints have been advanced to explain this phenomenon, including Kelly's theory that strictness explains the growth and decline of religious movements. Finke and Stark (2005) argue that the market economy provides a better explanation. In their view, conservative Protestant churches and organizations simply did a better job in competing in the twentieth century religious marketplace. They have made brilliant use of the media. They have presented a clear spiritual outlook that has been well communicated, and they have offered relevant programs and forms of community life that have met the desires of Americans more effectively than progressive religious bodies have done. Scholars such as Wuthnow (1988) argue that church membership and attendance data reflect the greatest division in American Christianity, liberalism versus conservatism, which cuts across denominational boundaries. The popular press describes these religious trends in ways that accentuate a binary view ("religious right" and "religious left"). Indeed this binary is reflected to some extent in this study. The megachurches and emergent churches usually expressed evangelical theology, while the vibrant liberal/mainline churches emphasized inclusiveness as a central theological principle, seemed more interested in embracing other religions as a possible source of wisdom, and came from a variety of denominations that have been declining in membership for decades.

In contrast to a binary view, the work of many other scholars reveals the complexity of religious trends in American culture. Woodberry and Smith (1998) note that while conservative Protestants are generally conservative on some theological and social issues, they are often innovative in worship styles and other areas; in their words, "Their resistance to modernity is highly selective" (p. 26). Moreover, there is greater diversity in their views than among the general public (as measured by statistical mean). Green, Rozell, and Wilcox (2003) studied religious right political activism in 13 different states and found diverse patterns and remarkable complexity. Frykholm (2004) describes the multidirectional flow of meaning between the conservative religious subculture and the broader culture: "We need to understand evangelicalism as sharing the field of popular culture, shaping it, and being shaped by it" (p. 184). She notes that American evangelicals are often enthusiastic participants in popular culture, enjoying movies, television, print media and other media alongside the rest of Americans. Evangelicals, Frykholm notes, seldom separate themselves from popular culture even as they complain about its immoral content. The work of these and other researchers affirms Christian life in the United States as a mosaic or a mobile, rather than the forced binary that is reported so frequently in quantitative studies and in the popular press.

Sociologist Fred Kniss (1997) agrees that a simple conservative-liberal binary is inadequate to describe the divisions in American Christianity, and he presents a model based on continua which he lays out on two axes. His model provides a helpful framework for summarizing many of the findings about the three kinds of congregations in this study. Kniss's first axis, charted horizontally in Figure 7.1, describes the location of moral authority, the basis for understanding of good, beauty and truth. On the modernist end of the spectrum, the individual is the locus of moral authority, and an individual's reason and experiences are the ultimate authority. On the other end of the spectrum, the traditionalist view holds that ultimate values are grounded in the moral authority of the collective tradition. In the case of Protestant congregations, authority would be grounded in the Bible and the traditions of a

Christian movement or a particular congregation. The second axis, charted vertically in Figure 7.1, describes where moral action should be targeted. This is the location of the moral project, which becomes the foundation for particular policies. The libertarian end of this spectrum asserts the primacy of the individual, and the focus of policies is to maximize the life of the individual. The ideal economic system is the free market. On the communalism end of this spectrum, the submission of individuals to the common good is emphasized, and the state is expected to promote these values by redistribution of resources and by limiting individual self-interested actions.

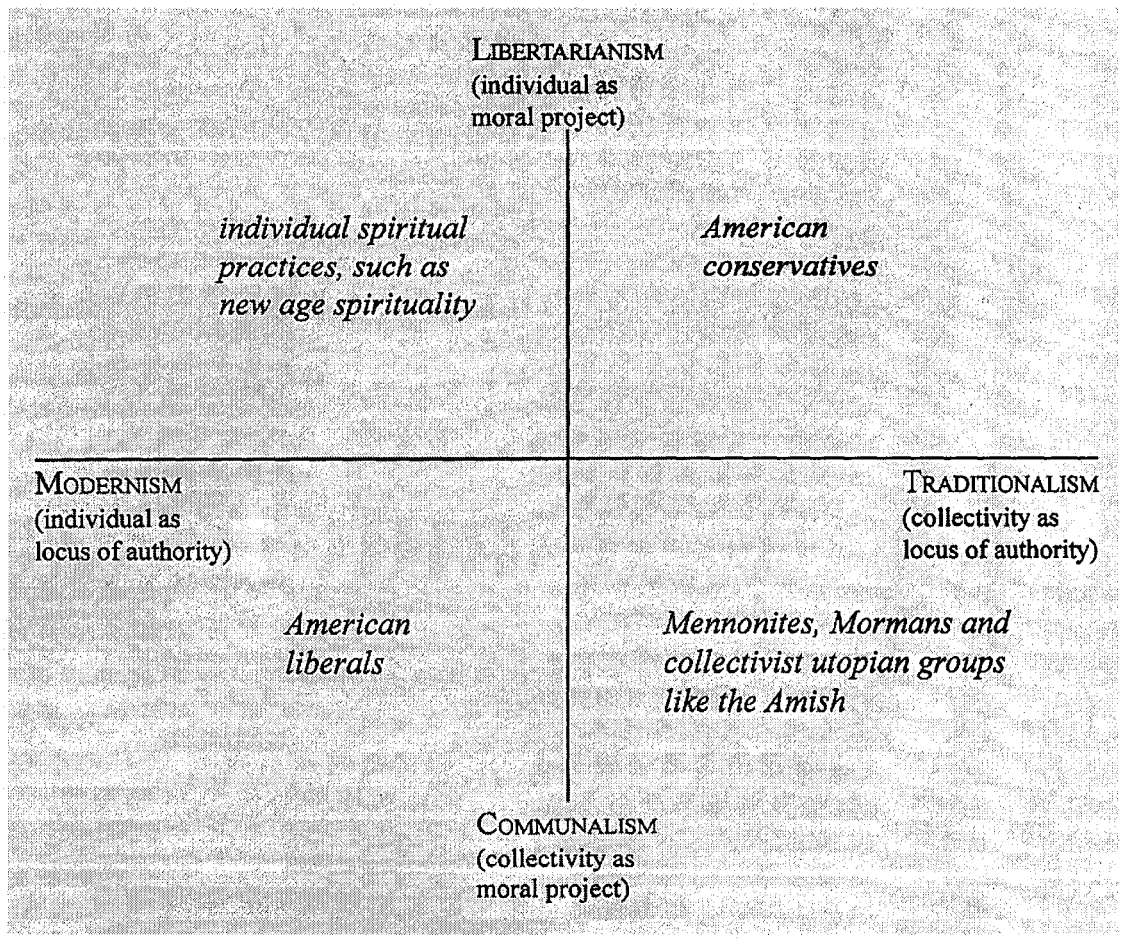

Figure 7.1 - Graphic representation of American religious ideological discourse (based on Kniss, 1997)

These two axes result in four quadrants. Kniss (1997) argues that conservatives are individualistic (libertarian) in viewing the moral project, but emphasize the collective (traditionalism) in locating moral authority, while liberals are individualistic in locating moral authority (modernist) while emphasizing the collective in the moral project (communalism). Kniss believes that Mennonites, Mormons, and some collectivist utopian groups such as the Amish emphasize the collective both in locating moral authority and in determining the object of the moral project. He does not locate any Christian groups in his fourth quadrant, where individualism is emphasized in the areas of both moral authority and the moral project. That quadrant would likely contain some of the people who engage in individual spiritual practices that are common in our time, including new age religious practices. Kniss's categories explain some of the complexities of the liberal-conservative debate in American Protestant religion today. In the popular press, both conservatives and liberals accuse each other of not emphasizing the communal enough or of emphasizing it too much; according to Kniss each group emphasizes the communal in different aspects of their priorities. Communal values coming from tradition motivate conservatives in the area of source of moral authority, while communal values motivate liberals in the desired outcomes of their ministry and service. Both liberals and conservatives accuse each other of focusing too much – or too little – on the individual, and again each group focuses on the individual in a different arena. Liberals value individualism in the realm of making moral decisions, while conservatives value individualism in the outcome of Christian ministry, via personal piety and devotion. Kniss's model provides a helpful framework for discussing the characteristics of the three kinds of churches as revealed by this study.

Because megachurches and emergent churches are evangelical, located at the conservative end of the theological spectrum, Kniss (1997) would likely argue that they would occupy the upper right quadrant of his diagram, while vibrant liberal/mainline churches, because of their liberal convictions, would apparently occupy the lower left quadrant. However, this study showed that each of these kinds of congregations has

unexpected characteristics in the way they represent themselves on the web. As Kniss would expect of evangelical churches, the megachurch websites in this study were largely traditionalist in their source of authority, placing high value on the Bible as a source of authority and, in many cases, stating clear congregational norms. Evangelical churches have long been viewed as emphasizing individual salvation over community life (Wuthnow, 1988; Noll, 2001), which would place these churches on the individualistic end of this second continuum. Indeed, the megachurch sites in this study emphasized personal spiritual growth. However, much of the verbal description of congregational activities affirmed the belief that individual growth happens in relationships in small groups, on mission teams, and while working with others on service projects. While the megachurch websites used the word "community" less frequently than the other two kinds of churches, their websites were structured in a way that invited the viewer to get involved, with many links to questions visitors might have, small groups, educational opportunities, and ways to engage in service. Individual salvation was mentioned on some megachurch websites in verbal text on pages deep within the website, but the homepages of the megachurches spoke of vibrant community with many options for engagement. Evangelical megachurches, based on their self-representation on their websites, would probably occupy the right side of Kniss's diagram, embracing traditional sources of authority, but they would occupy both the top and bottom quadrants on the right side, because they emphasized both individual personal growth and communal faith activities.

With respect to vibrant liberal/mainline churches, Kniss (1997) would argue that their source of authority would be likely to be individualistic. In contrast, this study showed that vibrant liberal/mainline churches, in their self-representation on the web, were more closely connected to their denominations than the other two kinds of churches. They were more likely to use the word "Jesus" on their homepages, and they often referenced Jesus or the Bible as the source of their inclusive values. They argued that the heart of the Christian faith, based in the Bible, is inclusive welcome. This study focused on liberal/mainline churches that were vibrant; it did not include

liberal/mainline which were failing to thrive. Perhaps these vibrant congregations were alive and functioning well precisely because they did not find their authority in individualistic values as much as other liberal churches do. Based on Kniss's model, liberal churches would be expected to locate the moral project, the foundation for specific policies, in the collective rather than the individual. Indeed, the vibrant liberal/mainline church websites in this study affirmed their commitment to collectivity in the moral project through their words about inclusive welcome and their discussion of the kind of inclusive community they wanted to offer. Their embrace of connections with their local community also argues for a commitment to communal goals in ministry. In addition, the vibrant liberal/mainline websites in this study used the word "community" more often than the megachurches. This is not the whole story, however. Vibrant liberal/mainline congregations in this study used the words "connect" and "relationship" significantly less often than the other type types of churches, which may indicate a weaker commitment to communalism, and they used the word "growth" as frequently as the megachurches, which argues for a commitment to individual spiritual growth. Most significantly, they talked extensively about inclusive community, but their websites were the least likely of the three kinds of churches to be structured in way that enabled such community to happen. They were the least likely to offer links to information for newcomers, FAQs, and to small groups, and they were less likely than the megachurches to offer links to educational and service opportunities. I conclude from this study that vibrant liberal/mainline churches, on their websites, may be committed to the goal of inclusive community, but they often lacked the specific tools that enable such community to happen. Individuals apparently have to find their own paths to involvement in the congregation, which indicated a functional individualism in the midst of a lot of words about community. This study indicates that these vibrant liberal/mainline congregations, then, occupy the same two quadrants on Kniss's chart as occupied by the megachurches but with distinct differences. Both megachurches and vibrant liberal/mainline websites affirm Christian tradition and the Bible as sources of authority; however, they choose different components of Christian

tradition and different values from the Bible to emphasize. With respect to the purpose of ministry, the megachurch sites may emphasize individual salvation, but they are functionally collective, while the vibrant liberal/mainline sites may emphasize inclusive community, but they are at least somewhat functionally individualistic.

On the emergent church websites, their embrace of the collective both in their source of moral authority and in their practices of ministry was hard to separate. The emergent churches, because they are evangelical, would be expected to embrace the collective as a source of moral authority on their websites, and this research indicates that they did. Not only did the emergent sites reference the Bible as a source of authority, they also expressed a commitment to engage with the values and practices of ancient Christianity. The collective was also the focus of the moral project for these churches. They offered more links to virtual community than the other congregations (blogs, chat, polls, message boards, and groups). Their websites were second after the megachurches in links to small groups. They were deeply committed to the arts, which they viewed as a communal activity. They used the words "community," "connect," and "relationship" the most frequently, and their discussions of these concepts were rooted in theology, with an emphasis on the character of God as communal. This almost seamless connection between the communal both as impetus and goal contrasts with both the megachurch and the vibrant liberal/mainline sites, which portray both individualistic and communal aspects to many areas of congregational life. The emergent churches, then, as they portray themselves on their websites would be located in the same quadrant with Mennonites, Mormons and the Amish in Kniss's (1997) study.

All three kinds of congregational websites showed signs of embracing the individualism of the American culture. All three kinds of churches drew on the advertising medium on their websites, a medium that encourages individual consumption. The emergent church websites seem to be most grounded in communitarian values and activities, yet their evocation of trendy coffee houses implied the individual choice of whether to participate or not in community, and indeed

verbal text on several of the websites conveyed permission to participate or not in congregational activities. Finke and Stark (2005) cite research they conducted in 2000 indicating that when people seek religious experience, the demand is highest for religions that offer "close relations with the supernatural and distinctive demands for membership, without isolating individuals from the culture around them" (p. 275). All three kinds of churches in this study did this well in their self-portrayal on their websites, even though they did it in different ways: the megachurches, with their contemporary and "relevant" worship and their ability to create connections for newcomers; the vibrant liberal/mainline churches with their inclusive community; and the emergent churches with their emphasis on history, the arts, and authentic community. In addition, the individualism and consumerism encouraged by the use of advertising techniques on congregational websites could be viewed as a way that congregations connect members to the culture around them. Finke and Stark's study also indicates that people do not want religions that demand total submission, nor do they want religions whose God is distant and powerless, and all three kinds of churches seemed to strike that balance. Finke and Stark believe that as the God of the Protestant mainline becomes more distant, less powerful, and offers fewer guidelines for living, mainline groups will continue to decline. The vibrant liberal/mainline congregations in this study, in the way they portray themselves on their websites, appear to have avoided these pitfalls. This study has revealed multiple dimensions of these congregations that may indicate why these three kinds of congregations were thriving and how their ministries reflected Finke and Stark's research on what Americans want from their congregations.

This study has also raised areas of concern. The megachurch websites encouraged service to the poor apparently without any visible concern for the structures of injustice that create poverty. Their deep embrace of consumerism as a model for Christian community was reflected not only in their website design but in their provision of so many personalized options for the people who attend. This was both their strength and their weakness: strength because they enabled people to get involved

and grow in faith, and weakness because the underlying consumerist presuppositions were not addressed. The vibrant liberal/mainline congregational websites had a powerful voice for inclusive values, but they seemed to have genuine difficulties in creating opportunities for their people to engage in the kinds of practical activities, particularly small groups and service opportunities, that provide concrete places for people to act in their beliefs. All too often their websites seemed to reflect the old adage, "all talk and no action." The primary weakness of the emergent church sites lies in their targeted appeal to a particular generational style. This is their strength because they appeal to generations that are often uncomfortable in traditional church, but it is also a weakness because the church needs to transcend generational priorities. Despite the emergent church embrace of historic Christian disciplines, they seemed to be situated in a particular time, place and culture to an unbalanced degree. I now turn to a discussion of the questions that remain unresolved in my mind as I complete this study.

For Future Study of Congregations

Phillips (2005) uses the metaphors of garden and circus to describe the opportunities and challenges facing Christian congregations today. She writes that the Bible portrays the place where God's people dwell as a garden, rich in growth and full of fruitfulness and life. In contrast, she suggests that most Christians live their lives more like a circus with multiple acts vying for attention under the big top, and she asserts that most congregations foster this atmosphere of frenzied activity. Heightened levels of attention are necessary in order to cope with the overstimulation that arises from so many circus acts happening at the same time. Absent is the sense of resting in a fruitful (and peaceful) garden. Congregational websites often appear circus-like, with an array of information and opportunities, each one trying to be "sticky" enough to keep the viewer there for a while. The viewer is urged into becoming a consumer of the circus acts. Because websites draw on the advertising genre, viewers see the photos and words, and perhaps even the links, through the lens of the memories of hundreds of thousands of ads that have come before, each one of them encouraging consumption in

some form. Can congregational websites in any way encourage the viewer into a garden rather than a circus? And would that be just another form of advertising?

Questions related to the garden and circus metaphor could be fruitful directions for further study of congregational identity and persuasion on websites. Other directions could be fruitful as well. Additional kinds of congregations could arguably present directions for the church of the future: Roman Catholic congregations, because of their increasing voice in our culture and their interesting alliances and differences with evangelicals, and Unitarian Universalist and Jewish congregations because of the rise of progressive religious voices in politics. In addition, the evangelical movement has many strands, including Pentecostalism, the African American Protestant tradition, the historic peace churches, churches in the holiness movement, as well as churches rooted in historic fundamentalism. Examining characteristics of these separate movements would likely reveal interesting and helpful insights. With respect to the specific aspects of the websites that were studied, web pages related to children and youth ministries were ignored, and it was clear from cursory glances at those pages that they present fascinating glimpses into the congregation's priorities. Many of the websites talked about stewardship of money, tithing, and Christian money management, additional topics that would undoubtedly reveal insights if studied. The language used to describe helping people was acknowledged briefly in this study, but much more work could be done on that topic, since all three kinds of churches engaged in service opportunities and talked about the need for Christians to make a difference in their communities and in the world. The concept of inclusion was so central to the vibrant liberal/mainline congregation's self-presentation that it would be a good idea to study other words associated with inclusion, such as welcoming, open, and affirming, to examine the ways they were used. Faith, identity, and the web are fertile relationships for future scholarship. To summarize more aspects of the study, I now turn to a metaphor of place that has resonance in discussing these three kinds of churches.

A Third Place

This study set out to explore aspects of contemporary congregational life that might reflect directions for the church of the future. A concept that reveals insights along those lines is idea of a "third place." Oldenburg & Brissett (1982) cite the coffeehouses and public houses of Europe, particularly in previous centuries, as examples of a third place. In the global South, a card game in a public square is another example. Neither the home nor the workplace, a third place provides a location for sociability and nondiscursive symbolism, which Oldenburg and Brissett describe as idiomatic, spontaneous, colorful and freewheeling conversation, steeped in stories and emotional expression, in contrast with conversation that is instrumental and pragmatic, used to give directions, solve problems, buy merchandise, write contracts, and talk with clients. A third place can host a spectrum of kinds of personal involvement, and is often a site for informal connections between people of different ethnic or socioeconomic groups. American society in the late twentieth century had very few third places. All churches have characteristics of a third place, but to the extent that the conversation in a church is instrumental and pragmatic, the identification of a congregation with a third place is diminished.

Of the three kinds of churches, emergent churches affirmed on their websites their desire to create places where conversation can be driven by personal stories and authentic self-expression. They alone used very few images of the congregation as a family; indeed they seemed to want to create a third place apart from the family. When Oldenburg and Brissett say that the loss of third places results in spiritual poverty, a malnutrition of the soul, they sound like leaders of an emergent church. The concept of heteroglossia intersects with this concept of a third place. All churches need to hold the Christian faith as their centering principle, but they also need to maintain that center in tension with a diversity of spiritual gifts, ways of service, and voices of personal experience. The emergent churches held that tension well, allowing the voices of congregation members to speak as if the websites themselves were third places, while also foregrounding the central tenets of the Christian faith. The nature photos –

flowers, trees, beaches, mountain vistas – that are present on some congregational websites may be an attempt by website producers to create something like a third place. One of the vibrant liberal/mainline interviewees talked about the flower photo on her congregation's website as a sign of "a place to go for hope and redemption."

What might a "third place" church look like, a congregation that draws on the best that these three kinds of churches have to offer? The megachurches would contribute their excellence in creating multiple pathways for people to get involved. A third place church would resemble megachurches in offering opportunities to do things with others – service, outreach, and practical helpfulness for people both within and outside the church – as well as places for learning and venues for sharing personal needs and hobbies. With an increasingly mobile society and a tendency for religious opportunities to be just one more commodity, this ability to enfold newcomers and members is significant and valuable. A third place church would have enough going on that everyone could find a place to fit in, but not so much that it felt frantic or overstimulating. Like the vibrant liberal/mainline churches, a third place church would provide a strong and warm welcome, and it would communicate what its values are and explain the connection between those values and the historic Christian faith rooted in the Bible. Participants would be invited to join not only in activities but also in shared values. A third place church would have a strong interest in the arts, and the significance of the arts as grounded in Christian theology would be articulated as it is in the emergent churches. Also like the emergent churches, a third place church would create places for honest and authentic conversation, full of stories, the kind of conversation identified by Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) as idiomatic, spontaneous, colorful and freewheeling. This kind of conversation would happen in face-to-face settings and online, and the congregation's website would be an integral part of the way the congregation creates a third place.

Ideally, the leaders of a third place congregation would be very aware of the semiotization that has been occurring in our culture, that we have grown dependent on symbolism, imagery and design in our construction of social, political, and economic

life (Lash and Urry, 1994). Congregational leaders of a healthy third place congregation would be conscious of their engagement with symbolism, imagery and design, the ways they portray their congregation as a busy, happy family like the megachurches, the nurturing parents like the vibrant liberal/mainline congregations, or the trendy coffeehouses of the emergent churches. They would be cautious about drawing on images of consumerism. They would respect the sincere and noble intentions that their staff and volunteers bring to the task of website design, while being aware of the power inherent in ads. They would be aware that the increasing use of websites by congregations will shape people of faith as individuals and will shape congregational life as well, and they would carefully observe this phenomenon.

Websites are here to stay, at least until the next new communication technology comes along, both for congregations and for a host of other organizations and businesses. Congregational life in all its richness and diversity is increasingly represented on websites, with newcomers searching for churches using websites, members accessing their congregation's website to listen to sermons or check the date for an upcoming class, and photos and words on homepages representing complex congregational identities perceived in a glance. Ministers and congregational leaders often appreciate the role of congregational websites in attracting new people, and they write text for website announcements, but not many of them embrace the challenges this medium presents. Few ministers and congregational leaders are "critical friends" of the website medium, engaging with site producers to discuss and evaluate visual components of the sites, consider issues of consumerism and commodification of congregational life, and explore the ways websites are shaping congregational life. This challenge is one of the major issues for the future of the church that came out of this study.

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Appendix A

The Six Exemplar Congregational Websites

These websites are considered in this study to be exemplars of their movements. They were observed almost daily over three months to generate variables for the content analysis described in chapter four and then observed later once or twice a week over seven weeks for the interpretive analysis described in chapter five.

Megachurches

Willow Creek Community Church
67 East Algonquin Road
South Barrington, IL 60010
847-765-5000
http://www.willowcreek.org

Saddleback Community Church
1 Saddleback Parkway
Lake Forest, CA 92630
949-609-8000
http://www.saddleback.org - visitor website
http://www.saddlebackfamily.org - member website

Vibrant liberal/mainline churches

Seattle First Baptist Church
1111 Harvard Avenue
Seattle, WA 98122
206-325-6051
http://www.seattlefirstbaptist.org/

St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church
500 De Haro Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
415-255-8100
http://www.saintgregorys.org

Emergent churches

Cedar Ridge Community Church
2410 Spencerville Road
Spencerville, MD 20868
301-384-7444
http://www.crcc.org/

Solomon's Porch
100 W 46th Street
Minneapolis MN 55419
612-874-6555
http://www.solomonsporch.com/

Appendix B

The Variables and their Definitions for the Content Analysis

Codesheet

date _____
For presence or absence variables
0 = no, 1 = yes

___ Text number (**ua**)

___ Type of Church (**typechurc**)
1 = megachurch
2 = vibrant liberal/mainline
3 = emergent

Variables - Home page

___ Number of photos (**numphoth**)
0, 1, 2, 3 . . . 30 = 30 or more

___ Number of photos of people (**numphoph**)
0, 1, 2, 3 . . . 30 = 30 or more

___ Number people in photos with direct address (**numphdah**)
0, 1, 2, 3 . . . 30 = 30 or more

___ Number of people in photos without direct address (**numphndh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 15 = 15 or more

___ Number of people in photos shown full-body (**numphfbh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 15 = 15 or more

___ Number of people in photos with head shots (**numphhsh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 15 = 15 or more

___ Number of photos of people serving (**numphseh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 5 = 5 or more

___ Number of photos of people worshipping (**numphwoh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 5 = 5 or more

___ Number of photos of buildings (**numphbuh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 5 = 5 or more

___ Number of nature photos (**numphnah**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 5 = 5 or more

___ Number of photos with anchorage (**numphanh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 5 = 5 or more

___ Photo of a minister of the church with anchorage (**photminh**).

___ Photo of historic art (**photarth**)

___ Use of slideshow (**slideshh**)

___ Number of graphics (**numgraph**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 15 = 15 or more

___ Presence of graphic associated with denomination (**graphdeh**)

___ Presence of mission or purpose statement (**misstath**)

___ Link off menu to mission or purpose statement (**loffmish**)

___ Link on menu to mission or purpose statement (**lonmissh**)

___ Link off menu to statement of beliefs (**loffbelh**)

___ Link on menu to statement of beliefs (**lonbelih**)

___ Presence of information for newcomers (**infnewch**)

___ Link on or off menu to information for newcomers (**linknewh**)

___ Presence of quotation from Bible (**quobiblh**)

___ Presence of quotation from a twentieth century Christian writer (**quowritb**).

___ Presence of quotation not from the Bible, dating from more than 100 years ago (**quowoldh**).

___ Number of imperative verbs not in menus (**impvoffh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 15 = 15 or more

___ Number of imperative verbs on menus (**impveonh**).
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 15 = 15 or more

___ Link off menu to questions people might have (**loffqueh**).

___ Link on menu to questions people might have (**lonquesh**).

___ Link off menu to prayer requests (**loffprah**)

___ Link on menu to prayer requests (**lonprayh**).

___ Link off menu to virtual community (**loffvirh**)

___ Link on menu to virtual community (**lonvirth**).

___ Link off menu to my account/my church/member log-in (**loffmyah**).

___ Link on menu to my account/my church/member log-in (**lonmyach**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to arts (**linkarth**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to music (**linkmush**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to small groups (**linksmgh**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to educational opportunities (**linkeduh**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to opportunities for involvement (**linkopph**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to site map (**linksimh**).

___ Search option (on or off menu) (**searchoh**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to audio (**linkaudh**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to video (**linkvidh**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to podcast (**linkpodh**).

___ Link (on or off menu) to newsletter (**linknwsh**).

___ Number of internal links (**numintlh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 100 = 100 or more

___ Number of outlinks (**numextlh**)
0, 1, 2, 3. . . 15 = 15 or more

___ Presence of statement of the church's ministry/mission/purpose/vision (**statmish**)

___ Presence of "welcome" in a larger body of verbal text (**welcomeh**)

___ Presence of "welcome" set off from larger body of verbal text (**welcbigh**)

___ Presence of "Bible" (**bibleh**)

___ Presence of "community" referring to the congregation or subgroups of the congregation as a community (**comcongh**)

___ Presence of "community" referring to the neighborhood or people around the church (**comneigh**)

___ Presence of "evangelism" (**evangelh**)

___ Presence of "growth" (**growthh**)

___ Presence of "inclusion" or "inclusive" (**inclusih**)

___ Presence of "justice" (**justiceh**)

___ Presence of "seeker" (**seekerh**)

___ Reference to God's love (**Godloveh**)

___ Reference to historic Christianity (**histchrh**)

___ Reference to personal mission/purpose (**persmish**)

___ Reference to serving the poor (**serpoorh**)

___ Reference to teaching or truth (**truthh**)

___ Reference to the world or international ministries (**worldh**)

___ Presence of "community" and "Bible" in the same sentence (**combiblh**)

___ Presence of "community" and "evangelism" in the same sentence (**comevanh**)

___ Presence of "community" and "growth" in the same sentence (**comgrowh**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of inclusion/inclusive in the same sentence (**cominclh**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of the church as home/family in the same sentence (**comhomeh**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commisch**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commisph**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**comworlh**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of poor/service in the same sentence (**compoorh**)

___ Presence of the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**chmipmih**)

___ Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of the poor/service in the same sentence (**pmipoorh**)

___ Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**pmiworlh**)

Variables on pages explicitly for newcomers/visitors, in the statement of ministry/mission/purpose/vision, or on a page of FAQs (if linked from the homepage).

___ Presence of "Bible" (**bibleo**)

___ Presence of "community" referring to the congregation or subgroups of the congregation as a community (**comcongo**)

___ Presence of "community" referring to the neighborhood or people around the church (**comneigo**)

___ Presence of "evangelism" (**evangelo**)

___ Presence of "growth" (**growtho**)

___ Presence of "inclusion" or "inclusive" (**inclusio**)

___ Presence of "justice" (**justiceo**)

___ Presence of "seeker" (**seekero**)

___ Reference to God's love (**Godloveo**)

___ Reference to historic Christianity or historic principles of a Christian tradition (**histchro**)

___ Reference to personal mission/purpose (**persmiso**)

___ Reference to serving the poor (**serpooro**)

___ Reference to teaching or truth (**trutho**)

___ Reference to the world or international ministries (**worldo**)

___ Presence of "community" and "Bible" in the same sentence (**combiblo**)

___ Presence of "community" and "evangelism" in the same sentence (**comevano**)

___ Presence of "community" and "growth" in the same sentence (**comgrowo**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of inclusion/inclusive in the same sentence (**cominclo**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of the church as home/family in the same sentence (**comhomeo**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commisco**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commispo**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**comworlo**)

___ Presence of "community" and the concept of poor/service in the same sentence (**compooro**)

___ Presence of the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**chmipmio**)

___ Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of the poor/service in the same sentence (**pmipooro**)

___ Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**pmiworlo**).

Definitions of Variables

Unit of Analysis
The unit of analysis for this study is a congregational website.

General definitions
The home page of a website is the page that first comes into view when church's URL is typed into a web browser. Most congregations' URLs are in the form www.nameofchurch.org. Occasionally the church's URL will take the viewer to a gateway page with a simple photo or graphic on it and only one link. In that case, the homepage will be defined as the web page that appears when that one link is clicked.

A link is defined as a highlighted word, phrase, or graphic that enables the viewer to access another web page when he/she clicks on the link.

A link off menu is defined as a link that is not located on a navigation bar or on a menu (list) that drops down from a navigation bar or drops down under a heading such as "quick links." A navigation bar is usually located on the top, left side, or bottom of a webpage and it lists in a vertical or horizontal form a series of options of links similar to a table of contents. Some navigation bars have lists of links (drop-down menus) that drop down from a them when a word is clicked.

A link on menu is defined as a link located in a navigation bar or drop-down menu.

The first grouping of variables will be examined on homepages, and variable names that end with "h" are home page variables.

Other pages on congregational websites will also be examined: pages explicitly for newcomers/visitors, statements of ministry/mission/purpose/vision, and pages with FAQs (if linked from the homepage). Variables that end with "o" are from the additional pages examined.

Variables that begin with "num" are counted, and the code sheet gives the way the results are described. All other variables record the presence or absence of a word, concept, or visual component, and are recorded as "0" for not present and "1" for present.

Variables - Home page

Number of photos (**numphoth**) – when a photo montage (photos that blur into each other) is present, count the number of photos that make up the montage. When a slide show (photos that alternate taking the same space) is present, count the number of photos that make up the slide show. Does not include graphics.

Number of photos of people (**numphoph**) – description of photo montage and slide show from previous variable apply here as well.

Number of people in photos with direct address (**numphdah**) – people looking directly at the camera.

Number of people in photos without direct address (**numphndh**) – this can include a partial view of someone's body

Number of people in photos shown full-body (**numphfbh**) – the entire body shows or at least the whole body from the thighs up. The person may be facing in any direction, toward or away from the camera.

Number of people in photos with head shots (**numphhsh**) – only shoulders and above.

Number of photos of people serving (**numphseh**) – people shown engaged in service activities, e.g foodbanks, construction efforts, relief ministries, etc.

Number of photos of people worshipping (**numphwoh**) – photos of worship services, people singing or praying.

Number of photos of buildings (**numphbuh**) – photos of church buildings or other buildings, shown whole or in part.

Number of nature photos (**numphnah**) – includes such things as trees, flowers, fish, sunsets, when not clearly identified with a building.

Number of photos with anchorage (**numphanh**) – photos with a word or description that identifies the content of the photo.

Photo of a minister of the church with anchorage (**photminh**).

Photo of historic art (**photarth**) – a photo of a painting or a statue that appears to be more than 100 years old.

Use of slideshow (**slideshh**)– photos, graphics, text or a mix of these items that take turns appearing in the same space.

Number of graphics (**numgraph**) – denominational logos, congregational logos, logos that promote particular ministries or organizations, graphical links, paintings or other art (not photographs).

Presence of graphic associated with denomination (**graphdeh**).

Presence of mission or purpose statement (**misstath**).

Link off menu to mission or purpose statement (**loffmish**).

Link on menu to mission or purpose statement (**lonmissh**).

Link off menu to statement of beliefs (**loffbelh**).

Link on menu to statement of beliefs (**lonbelih**).

Presence of information for newcomers (**infnewch**) – information explicitly labeled for newcomers or uses the word "new".

Link on or off menu to information for newcomers (**linknewh**).

Presence of quotation from Bible (**quobiblh**).

Presence of quotation not from the Bible, from a twentieth century Christian writer (**quowritb**).

Presence of quotation not from the Bible, dating from more than 100 years ago (**quowoldh**).

Number of imperative verbs not in menus (**impvoffh**) – a verb that appears to express command, entreaty or exhortation, a verb usually used without a preceding word and without an added ending such as "-ed" or "-ing." (Example of imperative verbs: join us, give, come, learn, find, share, grow, worship, celebrate, look here, sign up, let us know, learn more). Imperative verbs may also be preceded by the words "we invite you to" or "we welcome you to."

Number of imperative verbs on menus (**impveonh**).

Link off menu to questions people might have (**loffqueh**) – uses the word "question" and can include FAQs.

Link on menu to questions people might have (**lonquesh**)

Link off menu to prayer requests (**loffprah**) – a link that enables people to submit prayer requests.

Link on menu to prayer requests (**lonprayh**)

Link off menu to virtual community (**loffvirh**) – a link that connects viewer to blog, chat, poll, message board, yahoo group.

Link on menu to virtual community (**lonvirth**).

Link off menu to my account/my church/member log-in (**loffmyah**).

Link on menu to my account/my church/member log-in (**lonmyach**).

Link (on or off menu) to arts (**linkarth**).

Link (on or off menu) to music (**linkmush**).

Link (on or off menu) to small groups (**linksmgh**) – includes book groups.

Link (on or off menu) to educational opportunities (**linkeduh**) – includes classes, seminars

Link (on or off menu) to opportunities for involvement (**linkopph**).

Link (on or off menu) to site map (**linksimh**).

Search option (on or off menu) (**searchoh**).

Link (on or off menu) to audio (**linkaudh**).

Link (on or off menu) to video (**linkvidh**).

Link (on or off menu) to podcast (**linkpodh**).

Link (on or off menu) to newsletter (**linknwsh**).

Number of internal links (**numintlh**) – links that connect the viewer with a webpage connected to the church's URL.

Number of outlinks (**numextlh**) – links that connect the viewer with a webpage connected to a URL that does not relate to the church.

Presence of statement of the church's ministry/mission/purpose/vision (**statmish**)

Presence of "welcome" in a larger body of verbal text (**welcomeh**).

Presence of "welcome" set off from larger body of verbal text (**welcbigh**).

Presence of "Bible" (**bibleh**).

Presence of "community" referring to the congregation or subgroups of the congregation as a community (**comcongh**).

Presence of "community" referring to the neighborhood or people around the church (**comneigh**).

Presence of "evangelism" (**evangelh**).

Presence of "growth" (**growthh**).

Presence of "inclusion" or "inclusive" (**inclusih**).

Presence of "justice" (**justiceh**).

Presence of "seeker" (**seekerh**).

Reference to God's love (**Godloveh**) – e.g."love of God," "love of Jesus," "God's love," "Jesus' love."

Reference to historic Christianity (**histchrh**) – includes historic principles of a Christian tradition.

Reference to personal mission/purpose (**persmish**) – e.g. "personal life mission," "discover who God has designed you to be," "empowering members to express their true selves," "God's mission for our lives," "peoples' visions and ideas of ministry come to life," "equip members for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world"

Reference to serving the poor (**serpoorh**) – e.g. "poor," "needy," "refugees," "food pantry," "food bank."

Reference to teaching or truth (**truthh**).

Reference to the world or international ministries (**worldh**)

Presence of "community" and "Bible" in the same sentence (**combiblh**).

Presence of "community" and "evangelism" in the same sentence (**comevanh**).

Presence of "community" and "growth" in the same sentence (**comgrowh**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of inclusion/inclusive in the same sentence (**cominclh**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of the church as home/family in the same sentence (**comhomeh**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commisch**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commisph**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**comworlh**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of poor/service in the same sentence (**compoorh**) – concept of poor/service includes words like "poor," "needy," "refugees," "food pantry," "food bank."

Presence of the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**chmipmih**).

Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of the poor/service in the same sentence (**pmipoorh**) – concept of poor/service includes words like "poor," "needy," "refugees," "food pantry," "food bank."

Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**pmiworlh**).

Variables on pages explicitly for newcomers/visitors, in the statement of ministry/mission/purpose/vision, or on a page of FAQs (if linked from the homepage).

Presence of "Bible" (**bibleo**).

Presence of "community" referring to the congregation or subgroups of the congregation as a community (**comcongo**).

Presence of "community" referring to the neighborhood or people around the church (**comneigo**).

Presence of "evangelism" (**evangelo**).

Presence of "growth" (**growtho**).

Presence of "inclusion" or "inclusive" (**inclusio**).

Presence of "justice" (**justiceo**).

Presence of "seeker" (**seekero**).

Reference to God's love (**Godloveo**) – e.g."love of God," "love of Jesus," "God's love," "Jesus' love."

Reference to historic Christianity or historic principles of a Christian tradition (**histchro**).

Reference to personal mission/purpose (**persmiso**) – e.g. "personal life mission," "discover who God has designed you to be," "empowering members to express their true selves," "God's mission for our lives," "peoples' visions and ideas of ministry come to life," "equip members for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world"

Reference to serving the poor (**serpooro**) – e.g. "poor," "needy," "refugees," "food pantry," "food bank."

Reference to teaching or truth (**trutho**).

Reference to the world or international ministries (**worldo**)

Presence of "community" and "Bible" in the same sentence (**combiblo**).

Presence of "community" and "evangelism" in the same sentence (**comevano**).

Presence of "community" and "growth" in the same sentence (**comgrowo**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of inclusion/inclusive in the same sentence (**cominclo**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of the church as home/family in the same sentence (**comhomeo**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commisco**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**commispo**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**comworlo**).

Presence of "community" and the concept of poor/service in the same sentence (**compooro**) – concept of poor/service includes words like "poor," "needy," "refugees," "food pantry," "food bank."

Presence of the concept of the church's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose in the same sentence (**chmipmio**).

Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of the poor/service in the same sentence (**pmipooro**) – concept of poor/service includes words like "poor," "needy," "refugees," "food pantry," "food bank."

Presence of the concept of an individual's ministry/mission/purpose and the concept of world/international in the same sentence (**pmiworlo**).

Appendix C

The 60 Congregations Studied in the Content Analysis

Emergent

1
Extended Grace
2944 E Ellis
Muskegon MI 49444
231-865-8055
http://www.extendedgrace.org/

2
New Life Church
776 West Farm Rd 186
Springfield, MO 65810
881-5558
http://www.new-lifechurch.org/index.html

3
House of Mercy
499 Wacouta St.
St. Paul, MN 55101
651-298-0858
www.houseofmercy.org

4
The Church at Matthew's House
1874 Avenida Aragon
Oceanside, CA 92056
760-295-5662
http://www.matthewshouse.com/

5
The Bridge Church
P.O. Box 431154
Pontiac, MI 48343
248-332-8633
http://www.thebridgechurch.com/

6
Providence Community Church
1039 E. 15th Street, Plano, TX 75074
972-633-2223
http://www.providencecommunity.com/

7
Reba Place Church
PO Box 6017
Evanston, IL 60204
847-869-0660
http://www.rebaplacechurch.il.us.mennonite.net/

8
Wounded Healer Fellowship
The Great Commission Center (GCC)
4th Floor, 4350 W. Hallandale Beach Blvd
Pembroke Park, FL 33023
954-437-1855
http://www.woundedhealerfellowship.com/

9
Vineyard Central
1757 Mills Ave.
Norwood, Ohio 45212
513-396-7202
http://www.vineyardcentral.com/

10
Jacob's Well
1617 West 42nd Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64111
816-531-2757
http://jacobswellchurch.org/

11
Highway Church
201 Castro St., 3rd Floor
Mountain View, CA 94041
650-968-4200
http://www.highway.org/

12
Mission Gathering (Disciples of Christ)
3828 Herman Ave.
San Diego CA, 92104
619-624-9335
http://www.missiongathering.com/home.php

13
Mosaic
PO Box 4764
Austin, TX 78765
www.mosaicaustin.org

14
University Baptist Church
1701 Dutton Ave.
Waco, TX 76706
http://www.ubcwaco.org/mainblog/

15
Fusion Church
PO Box 54895
Oklahoma City, OK 73154
405-255-4405
http://www.fusionokc.com/

16
Vintage Faith
350 Mission Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
831-429-1058 x222
http://vintagechurch.org/

17
Church of the Apostles
4272 Fremont Ave. N.
Seattle, WA, 98103
http://www.apostleschurch.org/home.php

18
St. Paul's Collegiate Church at Storrs
1768 Storrs Road, Suite C
Storrs Mansfield, CT 06268
860-429-1830
http://www.spcc-storrs.org/

19
Three Nails
325 Oliver Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
http://www.threenails.org/index.html

20
theGathering
223 SW 7th Ave.
Amarillo, TX 79101
PO Box 2713
Amarillo, Texas 79105
806-576-1867
http://gatheringamarillo.org/

Vibrant Liberal/Mainline

21
St. Peter's Lutheran Church
619 Lexington Ave.
New York, NY 10022-4613
212-935-2200
http://www.saintpeters.org/

22
Broadway United Methodist Church
3344 N. Broadway
Chicago, IL 60657
773-348-2521
http://www.brdwyumc.org/

23
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
2045 N 800 E.
North Logan, UT 84341-1904
752-7753,
http://home.comcast.net/~princeofpeacelogan/

24
Church of the Holy Innocents San Francisco,
455 Fair Oaks Street
San Francisco, CA 94110-3618
415-824-5142
http://www.holyinsf.org/

25
Lord of Light Lutheran Church
801 S Forest Ave
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-3590,
734-668-7622
http://www.lol-a2.org/

26
Madison Christian Community
7118 Old Sauk Rd
Madison, WI, 53717-1099
608-836-1455
http://www.madisonchristiancommunity.org

27
Lyndale United Church of Christ
810 West 31st St.
Minneapolis, MN 55408
612-825-3019
http://www.lyndaleucc.org/

28
First Congregational Church
945 G. Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-628-4317
www.fccuccdc.org

29
First Presbyterian Church
City of NY
New York, NY, 10011
212-675-6150
www.fpcnyc.org

30
Trinity Lutheran Church / Manhattan
168 W 100th St.
New York, NY 10025-5145
212-222-7045
http://www.trinitylutherannyc.org/

31
Claremont UCC Congregational
233 W. Harrison Ave.
Claremont, CA 91711
909-626-1201
www.claremontucc.org

32
University Lutheran Church of the Incarnation
3637 Chestnut St
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2612
215-387-2885
www.uniluphila.org

33
Grace University Lutheran Church
324 Harvard St SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414-2920
612.331.8125,
http://www.graceattheu.org/

34
United Church of Hayward
30540 Mission Blvd
Hayward, CA 94544
www.haywarducc.org/

35
Central Presbyterian Church
201 Washington St. S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-659-0274, 814
www.cpcatlanta.org

36
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
219 N 6th Ave E.
Duluth, MN 55805-1924
218-722-3381
http://www.gloriadeiduluth.org/gloriadeihome.html

37
Wallingford United Methodist Church
2115 N. 42nd Street
Seattle, WA 98103
http://www.wallingfordumc.org/

38
First Congregational Church UCC
444 East Broad St.
Columbus, OH 43215
614-228-1741
www.first-church.org

39
Pasadena Presbyterian Church
585 E. Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena, CA 91101
626-793-2191
www.ppc.net

40
Ebenezer Lutheran Church
1650 W Foster Ave.
Chicago, IL 60640-2014
http://www.ebenezerchurch.org/

Megachurches

41
Hope Chapel
2420 Pacific Coast Highway
Hermosa, Beach CA 90254
310-374-4673
http://www.hopechapel.org

42
James River Assemblies of God
600 North 19th St.
Ozark MO 65721
417-581-5433
www.jamesriver.org

43
Calvary Chapel of Downey
12808 Woodruff Ave.
Downey CA 90242
562-803-5631
http://ccdowney.com/home/

44
Salem Alliance Church
555 Gaines St. NE
Salem OR 97301
503-581-2129
http://www.salemalliance.org/home/index.php

45
Sunshine Community Church
3300 East Beltline NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-364-4242
www.sunshinechurch.org

46
Bayside Church
8211 Sierra College Blvd Suite 440
Roseville, CA 95661
PO Box 2336
Granite Bay, CA 95746
916-791-1244
http://www.baysideonline.com/default.asp

47
North Coast Church
1132 N. Melrose Dr
Vista, CA 92083
760-724-6700
http://www.northcoastchurch.com/

48
Hope Presbyterian Church
8500 Walnut Grove Rd
Cordova, TN 38018
901-755-7721
http://www.hopepres.com/

49
King of Kings Lutheran Church
11615 "I" Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68137
402-333-6464
http://www.kingofkingsomaha.org/index.php

50
Mt. Corinth Missionary Baptist Church
4901 Providence Street
Houston, TX 77020
713-674-5667
http://www.mtcorinth.org/

51
College Church
2020 E. Sheridan
Olathe KS 66062
913-764-4575
http://www.collegechurch.com/

52
Christ Presbyterian Church
2323 Old Hickory Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37215
615-373-2311
http://www.christpres.org/

53
Fair Haven Ministries
2900 Baldwin Street
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(616) 662-2100
http://www.fhmin.org/index.html

54
The People's Church
828 Murfreesboro Rd.
Franklin, Tennessee 37064 /
615-794-2812
www.thepeopleschurch.org

55
First Baptist Church of Orlando
3000 South John Young Parkway
Orlando, FL 32805
407-425-2555
http://www.fbcorlando.org/

56
Vineyard Church North Phoenix
6250 W. Peoria Ave.
Glendale, AZ 85302
623-934-4000
http://vineyardnorthphoenix.com/

57
BranchCreek Community Church
100 South Main Street
Harleysville, PA 19438
215-256-0100
http://www.branchcc.org/

58
Christ The Rock Community Church
W6254 Hwy. 10-114
Menasha, WI 54952
920-730-8383
http://www.christtherock.org/

59
North Point Community Church
4350 North Point Parkway
Alpharetta, Georgia 30022
678-892-5000
http://www.northpoint.org/

60
Westover Church
505 Muirs Chapel Road
Greensboro, NC 27410
336-299-7374
http://www.westoverchurch.com/Home/Default.aspx

Appendix D

Questions Used for Telephone Interviews of Website Producers

What is your role in the production of the website?

What is the purposes and goals behind of the website? Are there specific things in mind? How are the purposes and goals established and by whom?

What are the things you look for when deciding what to place on the website? Are their specific things you look for, as well as specific things you avoid?

Who makes the decisions about content (both verbal and visual) on the website? What role at the church does that person or do those people hold?

What criteria are used to choose verbal content?

What criteria do you use to decide which photos and graphics to use?

What criteria are used to choose the verbal and visual content for the home page?

What criteria are used to chose material that will give information to newcomers and potential visitors?

What criteria are used to chose material that will give information to church members and regular attenders?

What criteria are used to decide which links will be on the home page?

In what ways have the website producers for your church discussed the following concepts as they relate to the website: community, the arts, purpose statements, mission statements, statements of faith, tithing, stewardship, welcoming newcomers, helping people grow in faith, prayer, helping people get involved, questions people might have?

What role does the senior pastor of your church have in choosing material for the website?

If the senior pastor is involved with the website, what are his or her priorities for the website? In what ways are those priorities similar or different from the other people involved with the website?

Who do you think benefits most from the existence of the website?

VITA

Lynne M. Baab (www.lynnebaab.com) is a Presbyterian minister who served two Seattle congregations in pastoral roles. She is the author of six books. Three of her books are published by The Alban Institute and focus on congregational leadership for Christian, Jewish, and Unitarian Universalist communities: *Personality Type in Congregations, Embracing Midlife,* and *Beating Burnout in Congregations.* Three other books are published by InterVarsity Press and focus on Christian spiritual disciplines: *A Renewed Spirituality, Sabbath Keeping,* and *Fasting.* As of July 2007, she holds a five-year position as lecturer in pastoral theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand.