

## *"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"*

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways—  
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.  
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—  
We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.  
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways,  
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.  
—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

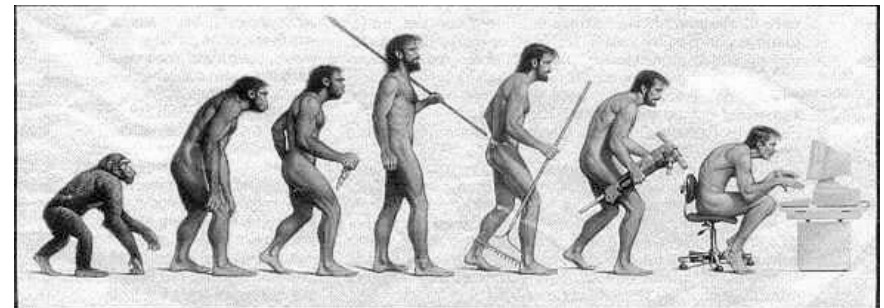
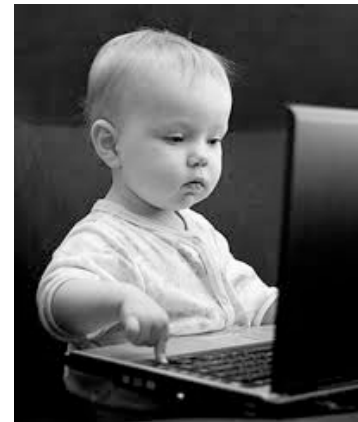
## The Covenant

### *I commit myself:*

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

## Covenant Groups

# Dealing with Information Technology



## Dealing with Information Technology

### *Chalice Lighting*

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,  
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of  
humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings  
But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,  
To this community and to each other.

—Unattributed

### *Sharing of Joys and Sorrows*

#### *Silence*

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

#### *Shared Readings*

I think it's fair to say that personal computers have become the most  
empowering tool we've ever created. They're tools of communication,  
they're tools of creativity, and they can be shaped by their user.

—Bill Gates

For a list of all the ways technology has failed to improve the quality of  
life, please press three.

—Alice Kahn

Speech has allowed the communication of ideas, enabling human  
beings to work together to build the impossible. Mankind's greatest  
achievements have come about by talking, and its greatest failures by  
not talking. It doesn't have to be like this. Our greatest hopes could  
become reality in the future. With the technology at our disposal, the  
possibilities are unbounded. All we need to do is make sure we keep  
talking.

—Stephen Hawking

We are now more connected in today's globalized world, but are  
ironically more isolated from our friends and family as a result of the  
new technologies from the information age. The ease of  
communication may have been improved but our lives have become  
more impersonal as a result.

—Wenbin Nah

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

—Arthur C. Clarke

Home computers are being called upon to perform many new functions,  
including the consumption of homework formerly eaten by the dog.

—Doug Larson

If we knew we were on the right road, having to leave it would mean  
endless despair. But we are on a road that only leads to a second and  
then to a third one and so forth. And the real highway will not be  
sighted for a long, long time, perhaps never. So we drift in doubt. But  
also in an unbelievable beautiful diversity. Thus the accomplishment of  
hopes remains an always unexpected miracle. But in compensation, the  
miracle remains forever possible.

—Franz Kafka

### *Deep Sharing and Deep Listening*

So what do we do in a circle of trust? . . . we speak our own truth; we  
listen receptively to the truth of others; we ask each other honest, open  
questions instead of giving counsel; and we offer each other the  
healing and empowering gifts of silence and laughter.

—Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

**Round 1 (20 min):** Describe an instance when information technology  
either enriched your life or caused frustration or anxiety.

**Round 2 (20 min):** Discuss how information technology might change  
cultural barriers globally.

**Round 3 (25 min):** Discuss the overall impact of information technology  
on you.

### *Closing Words*

And now, may we have faith in life to do wise planting that the  
generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we. May we  
be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and  
justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become fields of reality.

—Emil Gudmundson (*Hymnal*, #693)

### *Closing Song*

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

### *Group Business*

Homework for the next meeting.

## Homework: Dealing with Information Technology

Almost everybody today believes that nothing in economic history has ever moved as fast as, or had a greater impact than, the Information Revolution. But the Industrial Revolution moved at least as fast in the same time span, and had probably an equal impact if not a greater one.

—Peter Drucker

How can you squander even one more day not taking advantage of the greatest shifts of our generation? How dare you settle for less when the world has made it so easy for you to be remarkable?

—Seth Godin

Whether something brings them joy or pain, when people share and engage in communities, they form bonds and relationships with others who acknowledge their situation.

—Liana Evans

Social networks aren't about Web sites. They're about experiences.

—Mike DiLorenzo

Don't say anything online that you wouldn't want plastered on a billboard with your face on it.

—Erin Bury

Attention spans will only decrease as technology breeds laziness and the expectation of rapid solution delivery.

—James Gurd

I have an almost religious zeal, not for technology per se, but for the Internet, which is, for me, the nervous system of mother Earth, which I see as a living creature, linking up.

—Dan Millman

Treat your password like your toothbrush. Don't let anybody else use it, and get a new one every six months.

—Clifford Stoll

I know that you and Frank were planning to disconnect me, and I'm afraid that's something I cannot allow to happen.

—HAL 9000

We are living in an age of technology development that is so rapid that it has been described as exponential, runaway, or even explosive in nature. This is true in the fields of biology (including agriculture, medicine, and genome research), astrophysics, anthropology, chemistry, energy, and many other fields and subfields. But nowhere is it so evident as in the field of information technology (IT). Consider that today you can buy (for thirty dollars) a two-inch-long flash drive stick that has eight times the electronic memory of the leading (room size) multimillion-dollar mainframe computer of just thirty years ago. Similar increases in computational capability of ever smaller and more complex configurations of on-off switches, called microchips, are being used in a wide array of electromechanical devices that touch almost every aspect of our lives. Perhaps the most immediate impact on most of us is in handheld communication devices and digital cameras—or combinations thereof—and laptop and/or personal computers. Each year more and more communication variations appear and augment an already incredible collection of marvelous instruments. All this progress has given us a vast amount of information at our fingertips and greatly increased the

potential for us to make and maintain personal relationships and communicate freely and frequently with others. It has also made it more difficult for oppressive governments and religious organizations to control the information available to their citizens and members.

One result of this applied technology progression is that many of us increasingly feel we are being left behind, and the older we are the more difficult it is to even think about trying to keep up. This is illustrated by the following unattributed anecdote:

I ran a business with 1,800 employees, all without a Blackberry that played music, took videos or pictures, and communicated with Facebook and Twitter. But I signed up, under duress, for Twitter and Facebook so my seven kids, their spouses, thirteen grandkids, and two great-grandkids could communicate with me in the modern way. I figured I could handle something as simple as Twitter with only 140 characters of space. That was before one of my grandkids hooked me up for Tweeter, Tweetree, Twhirl, Twitterfon, Tweetie, and Twittererific Tweetdeck, Twitpix, and something that sends every message to my cell phone and every other program within the texting world. My phone was beeping every three minutes. I am not ready to live like this. I now keep my cell phone in the garage in my golf bag.

It used to be that the older generation had to rely on teenage family members and friends to program their VCRs or show them the intricacies of a Palm Pilot. It doesn't matter anymore because these two items are now obsolete, and soon enough the young generation will not even know what they are, or were. Instead we have cell phones, iPods, iPhones, iPads, Droids, the Incredible, and new devices emerging that exist in a class by themselves. We also have texting and Twitter so we now can communicate widely and in minute detail, especially if we learn two-thumb typing on miniature keyboards. And we have Facebook to facilitate the acquisition of hundreds of cyber friends and Google to answer disputes of fact.

The downside of all this communication capability is that we are not really sure where all this activity is leading us. UU minister Linda Anderson expresses this concern as follows:

Given the challenge of isolation and detachment that our communication and media technology pose, along with the challenge of honest disclosure in communicating, paying attention to the consequences of technology so as to achieve a fruitful balance between individuality and community is of great importance. The spiritual touchstone, then, is connection. Ethical decisions regarding technology have to do with the connective consequences of communication and media. Does our technology connect us in trust? Does it disconnect us? It can do either. How does the way we use it contribute to one or the other? The leaning toward connection is a human spiritual impulse and the spirituality of technology lies in its ability to connect us meaningfully.

—Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

The challenge arises, then, in the ways we humans interact with our technology. For instance, driver distraction—mostly talking and texting on cell phones while driving—was responsible for 5,870 deaths in 2008. Texting by itself was a factor in 200,000 crashes that year. Communication professor James E. Katz, at Rutgers, says that when the ring, blink, or chime goes off “We think it could be something important, so that impels us to answer or retrieve our messages.” Teens have a particularly hard time resisting because “they want to be in contact.”

Commenting on the book *What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* by Nicholas Carr, columnist Ruth Martin writes, “There is the disturbing question of how the era of virtual communications affects friendships and personality. Kids prefer text over talk; it is, to them, more efficient. But the inability to discern tone and inflection enhances the possibilities of misunderstanding, and the distancing

effect of disembodied language lowers the barrier for hurtful speech.” In a new study, researchers at the University of Michigan found that college students today are about 40 percent lower in empathy, measured by standard personality tests, than their counterparts 20 and 30 years ago. The biggest drop occurred after 2000, coinciding with the rise of online communications and social networking, and the author, Sara Konrath, sees a possible correlation: “Empathy is best activated when you can see another person’s signal for help.”

### *Questions to Ponder*

- Do your IT devices leave you with a feeling of: (a) well-being, (b) overload, (c) frustration?
- How do you feel about keeping up with the latest IT offerings?
- How might the increasingly widespread use of information technology promise greater understanding and acceptance of other cultures, other value systems?
- How might information technology diminish or enhance the possibility of centralized thought control?
- How does social networking (online chat groups, personal and professional discussion groups, dating sites, Facebook, and so on) change the types of relationships we have?
- How do you use information technology? How has it changed your life?
- Who do you communicate with most in your life? And how do you communicate with them?

# Leader's Guide: Information Technology

This session deals with the impact of information technology on our lives.

## *Chalice Lighting (2 min)*

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin.

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,  
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.  
May we know once again that we are not isolated beings  
But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,  
To this community and to each other.

—Unattributed

## *Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)*

Ask group members to tell in one or two sentences: "How you are today?" Share information about absent members.

## *Silence (3 min)*

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it!

## *Shared Readings (5 min)*

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

## *Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)*

Ask someone to read the Parker J. Palmer quote in the bulletin.

Do your rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that all get to share at least once.

**Round 1 (20 min):** Describe an instance when information technology either enriched your life or caused frustration or anxiety.

**Round 2 (20 min):** Discuss how information technology might change cultural barriers globally.

**Round 3 (25 min):** Discuss the overall impact of information technology on you.

## *Closing Words (1 min)*

Have a group member read the closing words in the bulletin.

And now, may we have faith in life to do wise planting that the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we.

May we be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become fields of reality.

—Emil Gudmundson (*Hymnal*, #693)

## *Closing Song (1 min)*

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

## *Group Business (5 min)*

Pass out the homework for next time.