I.   Introduction

What does it mean to be a religious educator (Christian[1] or otherwise), in a context in which many of the world's inhabitants – particularly in the dominant industrialized nations, are desperately trying to keep up with themselves and the changes that are occurring all around them? With new media proliferating in this "Electronic Age," how can the Gospel message be heard in the cacophony of voices competing for a "wired" population's attention? When many communities and individuals are reeling from both real and perceived changes in cultural awareness, philosophical understanding, technological progress, educational methodologies, and social institutions, how are they to interpret the messages that do get through? Historically, the Christian community has looked to religious educators as a source of knowledge and as spiritual guides through the chaos. Today, with so many people, particularly the young, discounting and leaving institutional religions and seeking spiritual nourishment from other sources, religious educators seem to have lost their meaning-making influence to other sources of cultural production. Rather than accept placement in the realm of obsolescence, I will argue that religious educators are now more essential than ever before.

To do this, we need an ecological perspective–a perspective that recognizes "the pattern of relations between organisms and their environments."[2] This vantage point enables us to recognize that religious education is more than simply the transmission of knowledge of a faith tradition's dogma, doctrines and teachings; it reveals that religious education is an intentional, dialogic, holistic and cyclic process with an ultimate aim of forming members to a particular way of life. Within the Christian tradition, this multi-modal process is centered on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and traditionally includes relational, identify-building engagements of community and communion, prayer and worship, service and outreach, teaching and learning -- all in the service of proclaiming the Word of God and witnessing God's presence in the life of the community. At the heart of this engagement are mentors and guides who, having heard God's call and experienced God's loving action, have chosen to share their experience with others in order to "pass on" the community's wisdom, spur conversation and gently guide other church members and new initiates as they too become disciples of Jesus Christ. After defining ecology and exploring ecological perspectives of religious education and media, I will show that a religious educator's role is that of a communicator. Noting the four eras of human communications, I will emphasize the religious educator's essential function within an educational ecology and show how the relatively young "Interactive Age" provides a significant advance in efforts to form members in faith and evangelize the uninitiated.

II. An Ecological Perspective

The term ecology has various connotations. Commonly associated with "green" or environmental issues, I am using the term more broadly as it applies to the interrelation of elements within a system(s) or location(s). Useful in Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day's definition of an "information ecology" is their reference to it as "a system of people, practices, values and technologies in a particular local environment" that are sustained by "the active, intelligent participation of the people involved in them."[3] Nardi and O'Day identify five primary characteristics that ecologies exhibit: systemic ("strong interrelationship and dependencies among its different parts"), diverse ("niches for many different kinds of roles and functions"), co-

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[1] Writing as Christian formed in the Roman Catholic tradition, I focus on the Christian community and its religious education efforts; however, I believe much of my analysis would be valuable within other faith groups as well.
[2] John H. Westerhoff, III. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976. 13.
[3] Bonnie A. Nardi and Vicki L. O'Day. *Information Ecologies.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999. 50-51.

evolution of components ("migrate and change together to fill available niches…lead in turn to further change as the entire system adapts to new constraints and possibilities"), with certain keystones species ("presence crucial to the survival of the ecology itself") and locality ("identity and place" established by the participant)[4]. Similar understandings of ecology have been applied within both religious education and media studies as well.

Writing in the early 1970s, John H. Westerhoff III recognized that religious educators did not work in isolation; he identified a symbiotic relationship between religious and social institutions that formed an educational ecology. Not only were predominantly Protestant Christian beliefs and values integrated into "the American Dream,"[5] but Christians' relied upon this milieu in their process for forming people in faith. Working together to form citizens into "Americans" and church members into Christians, a reciprocal ecological system of six institutions emerged that included the community, the family, the public school, the church, the media and the Sunday School.[6] Roman Catholics hoping to maintain their unique identity developed a similar ecological model that included the parish (ethnic neighborhood), the family, the Catholic parochial school, the church, the Catholic media and Catholics in the media, and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD)/Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). Westerhoff uses the word "enculturation" to highlight the impact of this ecological co-evolution that occurs when individuals and communities relate to and with multiple sources conveying the same and/or complementary values and meanings:

> "While much socialization literature has a tendency to emphasize how the environment, experiences, and actions of others influence us, enculturation emphasizes the process of interaction between and among persons of all ages. It focuses on the interactive experiences and environments, within which persons act to acquire, sustain, change, and transmit their understandings and ways. In enculturation one person is not understood as the actor and another the acted upon, but rather both act, both initiate action, and both react. It is the nature, character and quality of these interactive experiences among people of all ages within a community of faith that best describes the means of Christian education.[7]"

Notable in this description is his emphasis on interaction within a community. Westerhoff recognizes that "one Christian is no Christian, for we cannot be Christian alone."[8] Thus, rather than models of religious education that encourage individual passive participants (e.g. schooling instruction), he advocates that church leaders develop "a community of faith-enculturation paradigm" such that "faith is expressed, transformed, and made meaningful by persons sharing their faith in an historical, tradition-bearing community of faith."[9]

By focusing on the Church's relational nature, we see that our ability to love and be loved parallels our ability to know and recognize God's presence. Through relationships, we are formed from a people who know the Christian Story to a people who are the Christian Story. While there are many ways to learn about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, one cannot *become* a Christian without a community – a community that has a tradition and passes it on, that celebrates and through its ritual actions provides identity, meaning, direction and

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[4] Nardi, 56, 51, 51, 52, 53, 55.

[5] A religious self-understanding was infused in the United States' earliest self-concept that informed and formed both the country and its settlers. Tied to salvific visions and eschatological hope, the Puritans and other early settlers saw the United States as "the new Jerusalem" and themselves as the new Adam(s) and new Eve(s). During its subsequent evolution, leaders maintained an overwhelmingly Protestant ethos in U. S. civic and cultural institutions.

[6] Catherine L. Albanese identifies the deep influence of this predominantly Protestant religious ethos upon other faith groups and American civil society in *America Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1981).

[7] Westerhoff, 80.

[8] Westerhoff, 42.

[9] Westerhoff, 23.

inspiration. Christians are "made, not born."[10] Community, in this expression as Church, is a way of being in relationship with God, self, others and all creation that gives witness to an understanding of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is a communal space[11] – physical and otherwise, were by embracing intensely intimate, other-oriented, mutual relationships, individual and societal transformations occur and the Reign of God is made present.

Although "community" is an often a contested term and the variety of definitions it evokes markedly varies,[12] I contend that a set of constitutive elements for a faith-enculturating community can be extrapolated:
1. **Shared Story (Collection)**–narrative linking a group's past, present and future;
2. **Shared Vision (Creed)** –a focus beyond a group's own existence that gives it meaning and purpose;
3. **Shared Norms and Values (Code/Rule)**–definition of acceptable and unacceptable behavior with procedures to hold members accountable;
4. **Shared Practice(s) (Cultus)**–common rituals, often related to meaning-making;
5. **Shared Space** –"Geography" or "place" to congregate
6. **Identity** – there are clear boundaries indicating who is and who is not a member;
7. **Ownership** – sense of responsibility toward the community and willingness to help it's operation and functioning
8. **Sense of Belonging** – feeling cared for while caring for other members;
9. **Communication** – a means of Interaction through words and symbols;
10. **Time** - commitment to engage and interact so that relationships can develop

Incorporating these elements, then, a community is group of people who, through stable communication within set boundaries, create and enforce norms involving social interaction in the hope of establishing a sense of belonging and commitment and to achieve a common purpose or goal. The importance and impact of these communities cannot be underestimated. We are a social people and need such relationships in order to survive in a healthy and life-giving manner. We come to know ourselves and our place in the world as well as gain an interpretive framework through the company we keep. Whether athletic associations, service organizations or religious groups, the formative influences of the communities to which we belong are achieved through our connectedness and interaction.

One of the institutions Westerhoff identified within the educational ecology that both helps and hinders the development of an enculturating community of faith is the media. This

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[10] Mark Searle, Ed. *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. 1976.

[11] Historically, enculturating communities – both religious and not – have occurred in tangible, physical setting. In *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Paragon House, 1991)*,* Ray Oldenburg develops the concept that there are three essential places in people's lives: the place we live, the place we work and the place we gather for conviviality. In this third space, he argues, communities can come into being and hold together. Many adults can identify a site - a grandparent's home, the community store, a neighborhood bar, a youth center, a local parish – that stood as the hub and catalyst for all activity. Through stories shared, these meeting grounds - touchstones for young and old to disembark and return telling their tales - provided meaning, direction and inspiration and served as sites of initiation, orientation, commissioning, support, and proclamation. I contend that these spaces can be virtual as well as physical.

[12] M. Stacey's sociological work defines community to include a territory or boundary within which a group maintains a social system and a sense of belonging. In *The City of God,* Saint Augustine defined community as "a group of people united by the common objects of their love." Harold Rhiengold distinguishes a community from other groups by a common orientation toward some significant aspect of life whereby there is agreement to a set of values and a commitment to common goals/goods. In this definition he is using Marc Smith's concept of three "collective goods:" social network capital, knowledge capital and communion that I parallel as formational, informational and transformational relationships. Rhiengold recognizes that community provides opportunities for intimacy as well as a definite set of expectations for behavior and membership.

recognition of the ecological influence of communications technology is reiterated among communications scholars and critics loosely united in an emerging disciple called Media Ecology.[13] Moving away from traditional understandings of communication that were based in what media theorists call a transportation model - a model where the focus is on how a message gets from one location (the sender) to another (the receiver) via a vehicle (a medium of communication), Media Ecologists look at the *entire* process of communications and its impact upon a community. Media Ecology highlights how organisms interrelate to and with one another in physical environments as well as the radical changes that result when new technologies are introduced.[14] It also documents that when new technologies are introduced, they typically replicate the characteristics of previous technologies, until their unique aspects can be developed. This emerging field follows the trajectory of research about the environmental effects of media that begins with Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan[15] who argued that during the course of human history different media have dominated individual and communal communication efforts that in turn have significantly formed and transformed the society/ies within which they were utilized.

The recognition that ecological systems are continually informing, forming and transforming one another is important. Never static, ecologies change. Recalling Nardi and O'Day's insight that as components "migrate and change together to fill available niches… [there is] further change as the entire system adapts to new constraints and possibilities."[16] Under the evolving influences and pressures of contemporary society, Westerhoff recognized the pending demise of the educational ecological system he described:

> "A pluralism of religious persuasions interact and compete… families are smaller and children often lack any significant direct interaction with grandparents and relatives…the public school is now the religiously neutral institution intended by the Constitution… and the church is rarely the center of people's social and community life."[17]

No longer sharing complementary messages, institutions that once worked with Christian institutions (e.g. the media) now create and promote their own set of cultural values and societal

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[13] The Media Ecology Association (www.media-ecology.org/) uses a 1973 dissertation by Christine Nystrom as its defining moment as an emerging discipline. "As a perspective, meta-discipline, or even a field of inquiry, media ecology is very much in its infancy. Media ecologists know, generally, what it is they are interested in—the interactions of communications media, technology, technique, and processes with human feeling, thought, value, and behavior—and they know, too, the kinds of questions about those interactions they are concerned to ask. But media ecologists do not, as yet, have a coherent framework in which to organize their subject matter or their questions. Media ecology is, in short, a pre-paradigmatic science. Christine Nystrom, *Towards a Science of Media Ecology*. NYU: Doctoral Dissertation, 1973.

[14] Neil Postman was the first to use the term ecology in relation to the media: "Media ecology is the study of transactions among people, their messages, and their message systems. More particularly, media ecology studies how media of communication affect human perception, feeling, understanding and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances for survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments – their structure, content and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message system that regulates ways of feeling and behaving. It structures what we can see and say and, therefore, do. Sometimes, in the case of a courtroom, or classroom, or business office, the specifications of the environment are explicit and formal. In the case of media environments (e.g. books, radio, film, television, etc.) the specifications are more often implicit and informal, half concealed by the assumption that we are dealing with machines and nothing more. Media ecology tries to male those specifications explicit. It tries to find out what roles media force us to play, how media structure what we are seeing, why media make us feel and act as we do. Media ecology is the study of communications technology as environments."   Neil Postman and Charles Weingarten. *The Soft Revolution: A Student Handbook for Turning Schools Around.* New York: Dell Publishing, 1971. 139.

[15] Additionally, within Religious Education, Pierre Babin and Michael Warren each theorize the concept of formation in relation to media. Babin was influence by Marshall McLuhan, and Warren's work in cultural studies furthers Babin.

[16] Nardi, 52.

[17] Westerhoff, 15-16.

norms. The history of television and its relationship with religious program placement documents this shift. During the early days of broadcast television – the 1950s and 60s, public service or "sustained time" was available to the major faith groups *without cost;* Bishop Fulton Sheen shared wisdom weekly in prime time opposite Milton Berle. In the 1970s and 80s televangelists populated the 3 major networks, particularly on Sunday mornings, as they edged out the mainline faith groups by "buying time"[18]; Among the earliest programs were Rex Humbard's *Cathedral of Tomorrow, Oral Roberts and You,* Pat Robertson's *700 Club*, and Jim and Tammy Bakker's *PTL Club*. Today, religious programming is notably absent from most broadcast networks and clusters on one or possibly two "religious channels" available through cable television; in most cable markets even religious programmers like ETWN capable of supplying 24 hours/day must share a channel as they do in Boston with the Boston Catholic Television Center and the Inspiration Network. Driven by economic incentives, access to airwaves diminished. While the increasing costs and decreasing access to airtime directly impacted the producers and directors of religious programming by limiting their ability to share a Christian message, the shift has had a more devastating ecological impact: the diminution of religion. Consciously or unconsciously, the move of religious programming from weeknight "prime time" to Sunday "graveyard" forms viewers' attitudes toward religion and issues of faith.

Institutional changes like religious program placement have been compounded by interpersonal shifts. With an increasingly mobile society, intergenerational interactions are diminished or non-existent thus limiting the potential for passing on family traditions and sharing communal wisdom. Expanding rosters of single parent and two-working parent families limit the "quantity time" families spend together and thus the values members can instill upon one another. Additionally, a proliferation of extracurricular options and societal pressures to begin building a child's resume early increasingly push families to prioritize activities like soccer above church-related activities, including Sunday worship. As a result, the proclamation of the Christian message in the late 20th and early 21st century to a large extent has been muted. Thus, unlike the 1970s which Westerhoff indicated had up to six institutions collaborating within an ecology to promote a (Judeo-) Christian based agenda, Christians in the new millennium are confined to one or possibly two institutions: the Sunday school/religious education program and the church through its worship. While such reduction *may* be adequate for the transmission of *religious information* within a particular denomination, I contend that one or two hours, typically on Sunday, are insufficient for the enculturation that Westerhoff described. The type of faith formation which leads to personal and social transformation requires more.

Many theologians and cultural critics are quick to point to the electronic media as the source of this demise. In his book *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture*, Richard Gaillardetz sets out "to demonstrate that modern technology has reshaped our daily existence in ways that can make it difficult to experience the grace of God in our lives."[19] By focusing on the commercial interests under-girding the new technologies, particularly of television and the Internet, Gaillardetz cautions against their lure toward a lifestyle of commoditization. Equally critical of electronic media in general and television in particular, Neil Postman argues that we are *Amusing Ourselves to Death* in his 1985 book of the same title. He sees "entertainment as the supra ideology of all discourse on television. No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that the television and television programming are there for our amusement and pleasure."[20] These analyses warrant attention. Still, a longstanding tradition of Christian Religious Educators utilizing every medium available to respond to a call to communicate the Gospel Message and a more centrist view of

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[18] Peter Elvy. *Buying Time: The Foundations of the Electronic Church.* Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications: 1987. Also, Peter G. Horsfield. *Religious Television: The American Experience.* London & New York: Longman, 1984.
[19] Richard R. Gaillardetz. *Transforming Our Days.* New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000. 11.
[20] Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. New York: Penguin Books, 1985. 87*.*

the history of human communication indicate that contemporary technological advancements may in fact provide a solution to the eroding ecological relationships and complement the process of enculturation and faith formation. By recognizing communications as part of the role of a religious educator, the unique possibilities initiated in this new era of human communications are illuminated.

III. Religious Educators[21] Are Communicators

In telling "the story of the story that made us who we are,"[22] Marianne Sawicki's *The Gospel in History* provides a bridge linking an ecological perspective of Christian religious education with the church's communicative action. She looks at the interrelation of personnel, institutions, methods, media and content for each historical period she delineates to categorize the church's educational ecology as "*words* of proclamation and reflection, *care* for human needs, and *celebration* of the intimate relationship between God and human beings established in Jesus Christ." Although she never explicitly defines the church's efforts as an ecology, her "portrait of the church" parallels Nardi and O'Day's five primary characteristics: systemic, diverse, co-evolutionary, keystone species and local. This portrait starts with "the human reality of the church…[and] the dynamic reality of the gospel story,"[23] then depicts an intricate interrelationship of individuals and societies, in time and across time, grounded in God's presence as revealed in Jesus Christ and maintaining continuity with him and his work. For Sawicki, the gospel is source, goal, content and process and the church is both medium and message:

> "First, the church is the **result** or outcome of the telling of the gospel story in our history. We could say that the church is simply the collection of all those people who have heard and accepted the good news of the gospel. But it would be more accurate to say that the church is a particular way of being human together, a way that is made possible by the recognition that the deepest meaning of human existence is to love and be loved by God…Second, the church is the **agent** of the gospel. It tells or proclaims the gospel story to the world…Third, the church is the **medium** though which the gospel message travels to people in lands and times that are far distant from those in which Jesus and the biblical books appeared…Fourth, the church itself embodies the **message** of the gospel…The medium is the message; the parish is the curriculum."[24]

Sawicki delineates that as one is formed by the message heard, embraced and lived, so one becomes the message that forms others. Becoming a Christian meant living Christianity. Everyone who embraced the faith was challenged to become a witness to the faith - a communicator of the gospel and religious educator, even if following Jesus led to death.

Deeply rooted within the Jewish heritage maintained by these founding members of Christianity, and recorded in their subsequent writings codified in the Christian Bible, four biblical passages delineate the features common among religious educators: 1) a call and response, 2) a message, 3) a method and 4) media. Although not an exact parallel with Sawicki, they reflect the alignment she explores of religious education with communications. The first,

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[21] Within the earliest Christian communities, there was no ecclesial designation of "religious educator"; A fairly recent phenomena, the concept developed with the professionalization of the field about 1909. As Gentry Shelton notes, "While Christian education is as old as Christianity itself, the [vocation known as] 'director of Christian education' is remarkably young." (Gentry A. Shelton. "The Director of Christian Education." In *An Introduction to Christian Education,* Marvin J. Taylor, ed.. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966. 117). Still, underlying the call to be a disciple was the function of religious education. This paper primarily addresses the vocation of all Christians to be religious educators, but by implication of their initiation would include professional Christian Religious Educators as well.

[22] Sawicki, 5.

[23] Sawicki, 10.

[24] Sawicki, 10-11.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, was known within the Jewish tradition as the Shema.[25] It recognizes the parental role as primary educator and commands them to use every moment and every means available to pass on their faith. In a move that focuses more on communicating to adults and a disciple's responsibility to share what they have heard, Paul's letter to the Romans (10:14-15) reminds that without this communicative function, no one will know Jesus or his message.[26] Uniting this sense of call with a specific injunction to communicate the Good News, the third passage, from Matthew (28:16-20), records Jesus' commissioning of his disciples and the command to teach.[27] And finally, it is not enough to share the word, disciples must help others less familiar with the story interpret and understand its import, as articulated in the Acts of the Apostles (8:27-31).[28] This combination of call and response with message, method and methodology continue to be found throughout the emerging and later established Christian Church and its effectiveness of connecting teaching with common belief and common practice in creating and maintaining a cohesive community is evident in the book of the Acts of the Apostles:

> *They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal*
> *life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. – Acts 2:42*
>
> *The community of believers was of one heart and mind. – Acts 4:32a*.

In this model, knowledge meant responsibility and hearing the Word was generally followed by an immediate response to proclaim the word. Encountering Jesus, generally through interaction with a disciple who had known him or one of his followers, led to a decision to become a disciple and a member of the Christian community. The espoused was operative.

As time passed, and with it the opportunity for personal interaction with those who knew Jesus and his disciples, other media were incorporated to reach out to potential members, to invite them to participate with the believing community, and to aid the mission of forming, informing and transforming emerging communities. Representative of these are oral traditions passed from generation to generation proclaiming the Good news; handwritten letters supporting and inspiring fledgling Christian communities; crude paintings recalling Biblical stories of salvation decorating 2-3rd century C.E. tomb walls; basilicas' magnificently adorned as "Stone Bibles" illuminated through stained glass, frescos, mosaics and statues; mass produced treatises speeding across continents promulgating 15th Century dissidents' voices; radio and

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[25] Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!" You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, And with all your soul, And with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your Children and talk about them when you are home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." - Deuteronomy 6:4-9

[26] For Scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him… But how can they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they to believe in one of whom they have not heard? And how can they to hear without someone to preach? And can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" - Romans 10:14-15

[27] The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshipped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached them and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe what I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." - Mt 28: 16-20

[28] Now there was an Ethiopian Eunuch, a court official of the Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah (53:7-8, a passage that Christianity from its earliest origins applied to Jesus – sheep led to slaughter…). The Spirit said to Philip, "Go and join up with that chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian replied, "How can I unless someone instructs me?" So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him…-- Acts 8:27-31

television airwaves transmitting televangelists to national and international audiences; and highly produced multi-sensory worship breaking open the Word within congregations. Today, religion has moved online and web sites propagate everything from weekly parish bulletins and educational resources to prayer lines and chat-room confessionals. These media reflect different eras of human communications and their impact upon their communities is best explored by incorporating an ecological view.

IV. Four Eras of Human Communications

During the course of human history, different media have dominated individual and communal communication efforts that in turn have significantly formed and transformed the society/ies within which they were utilized.[29] In considering these communication media, most scholars agree that they can be categorized into four eras of human communication: oral, written, printed and electronic. While these categories recognize the technological advances in forms of *transmission*, they obscure the revolutionary contributions particular to the digital revolution within the electronic age. Thus, because "print" and "electronic" delineate eras based upon the medium by which communications occur, they do not express the more significant shift from a more passive, mono-directional transmission (mass produced print, radio, television, cable, etc.) to a more interactive, multi-directional, one (telephone, computer, Internet, etc). As a result, I offer a slight nuance to the one commonly accepted. This new articulation more clearly emphasizes the ecological impact of the four eras and classifies them as oral, written, mass-mediated and interactive media. Rather than a depth analysis of this shift[30] which is beyond the scope of this paper, I will briefly describe each era and its ecological significance, then identify its use and impact in the church and upon religious educators' efforts to communicate the faith.

1. Oral

The first age of human communications, the Oral Age, recognizes the primacy of human articulations of sound, and later words. Throughout existence, human beings have shared thoughts and information through the use of *all* their senses – touch, taste, smell and sight, as well as hearing; however, Walter Ong S.J. defends his position that oral communication dominates the majority of human history (and present). He notes that "of all the many thousands of languages, possibly tens of thousands, spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to the degree to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all. Of the 3000 languages spoken today only some 78 have a literature!"[31] He explains that in oral cultures, memory is highly developed and learning occurs "by apprenticeship (hunting with experienced hunters), discipleship (a kind of apprenticeship), listening, repeating what is heard, mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them, assimilating other formulary materials, participating in a kind of corporate retrospection – not by study in the strict sense."[32] Thus, oral cultures embrace story and rely on narratives.

Storytelling was at the heart of the Jesus Movement that later evolved into the Christian Church. Rooted in Judaism's deep oral tradition, Jesus' apostle and disciples shared their experience of Jesus and his message through proclamation and conversation. Though not formally recognized as religious education, people gathered to tell stories - in small groups and large, in the open expanse of fields and in designated "house-churches," so that they could re-member Jesus and his message, support one another in living his vision and share their lives, including a meal. It was (is) an intimate, interactive enterprise. In so doing, they became part of

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[29] In the earliest study identified as part of media ecology, Harold Innis noted the relationship between the growth of communities into cities and the itinerant communications brought by Canadian fur traders.
[30] The argument to classify the four eras of human communication as oral, written, mass mediated and interactive instead of oral, written, print and electronic is taken up in my dissertation "Fashioning A People in An Interactive Age."
[31] Walter Ong S.J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* London and New York: Routledge, 1982. 7
[32] Ong, 9.

a living tradition that maintained Jesus' presence and acted to establish the Reign of God; a process that continues today.

2. Written communications

Written forms of communication appeared about 3300 B.C.E. as someone or some group invented a visual form for expressing their oral speech. Hieroglyphics, cuneiform, and alphabetic characters developed as standard signs of specific meanings. Using various techniques–etching in stone or soft clay, writing on papyrus and later paper, the placement of these signs and letters on a medium created a permanent artifact for passing ideas and information not only from one generation to the next, but – depending on its durability – across multiple generations. This writing of one's thoughts and stories enabled the "knower" and the "known" to be separated; for the first time, a distance was created such that analysis, critique, introspection and self-examination became possible. In freeing the mind from remembering the story, writing changed not only what was thought, but also how thought occurred.[33]

The letters attributed to Paul from about 50-52 A.D. are the earliest identified written Christian records. As Paul's mission to the Gentiles expanded the geographic bounds of the Jesus movement, these letters provided leadership and direction for the emerging communities, shared information about the Jesus movement in general, and offered instruction on the why's and the ways to live as Jesus commanded. As those who had direct and secondary contact with Jesus began to die and Jesus' return seemed less imminent (typically dated as 80 AD and beyond), the need for preservation led members of the faith community to expand efforts to write down their versions of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and teachings. Through a series of subsequent redactions, codification into canon, and translations into other languages, this Gospel[34] provided both the early faith community and the contemporary Christian access to its origins. The church's tradition continues to be written; this permanent record helps the community in its effort to re-member Christ with the faith community.

3. Mass Media

The Third Age of Human Communications illuminates the shifts in communications technology that enabled *mass* distribution of the *same* message across a wider geographic area then previously conceived possible. Occurring first with print, and than via electronic media, distribution changed from one-to-one or one-to-a-few, to one-to-many. Johannes Gutenberg inaugurated the age in 1450 C.E., but not by inventing the printing press as is commonly presumed. Printing processes were known to exist as early as 1350 B.C.E. with the Egyptians processes for printing books; Romans read a daily newspaper, the *Acta Diurna*, which was printed on papyrus as early as 131 C.E.[35]; and moveable type was used in China by the 11th Century pre-existing Gutenberg's invention.[36] Gutenberg's unique contribution revolutionizing the industry was the *systematic mechanization* of the process with interchangeable parts, similar to Henry Ford's much later development of the assembly line. With later advances in printing methods, Gutenberg's process led to the mass creation of images (etchings, lithographs, photographs, etc.), thoughts and ideas that, when coupled with the use of colloquial language marked the creation of popular culture.[37] Conversation was no longer limited to the

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[33] Ong, 8.

[34] The term "gospel" passed rather quickly through four stages of meaning during the 1st Century: 1) Jesus' Preaching, 2) the content of the early Christian communities' preaching about the death and resurrection of Christ, 3) the preaching that summarized the ministry of Jesus and the good news about God, and 4) the books that provide a written form to the oral traditions. Mark Powell. *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels*.

[35] The common practice was for signs, symbols and letters to be carved on wooden blocks, inked, and then printed on papyrus and other material one page at a time.

[36] William Fore. *Mythmakers: The Gospel, Culture and Media*. New York: Friendship Press, 1990. 32.

[37] As the book came of age by 1500, the use of the vernacular took the forefront. "The increasing output of books in vernacular high and low German undoubtedly gave more people access to information traditionally written in Latin.

local town square, written discourse was not reserved for the privileged that could afford access to hand lettered texts and a type of "global" awareness was initiated by a printed medium that could be distributed in large quantities at a significantly more affordable price. Three centuries after the invention of printed mass media, Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph in 1844 began the prolific series of electronically based technological advancements[38] that could share sounds representing words (telegraph), actual voices (telephone, phonograph, radio) and moving images (film, video, television, etc). The electronic media's ability to record the human voice and visually document, in full motion, the expression of human emotion established them as a powerful motivator, particularly when voice and video are supplemented with an environment-establishing soundtrack. More significant than their emotive ability, however, is the electronic media's ability to appear simultaneously across time and space. Oral, written and mass-media print communications depend upon someone or some transportation vehicle to physically carry their message from one location to another; these new electronic technologies revolutionized human communications by enabling the distribution of a message without a *physical* form, a characteristic that lead Tony Swartz to proclaim "*Media: The Second God*."[39]

History reveals extensive Christian use of these printed and electronic mass media and an ecological perspective recognizes the correlative impact they have had on one another. Carmen Luke successfully argues that it took the catalyst of the Protestant Reformation to initiate the print mass production revolution.[40] As a proliferation of vernacular Bibles, sermons, addresses, and treatises on topics ranging from the new understandings of the faith (catechisms) to family relations and childrearing supplemented Luther's theses, mass media provided a means to initiate discourses on religious, social and political thought and expand participation throughout Germany - and an eventual schism. For the counter-reform movement seeking to emphasize a unified message and maintain control, it established an efficient and cost-effective means to standardize concepts and interject the importance of recognizing proper authorities.[41] Similarly, a survey of radio, television, cable, and satellite-delivered efforts suggest that early secular broadcasters, Christians and religious educators anticipated mutual benefit by joining forces; broadcasters believed faith-oriented programs would attract audiences and Christians saw electronic media as a powerful tool for spreading the good news and forming people in faith.[42] The breadth and creativity of these and other mass mediated efforts are

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And although Latin still predominated in scholarly works… the book reading public became from then on… increasingly a lay public – made up in large part of women and merchants, many of whom had hardly any knowledge of Latin." Carmen Luke. *Printing, Pedagogy and Protestantism*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989. 60.

[38] These advancements included Graham Bell's telephone (1876), Thomas Edison's phonograph (1877), Lumiere and Edison's motion pictures (1891), Marconi's wireless (1895), broadcast radio (1920), sound movies (1927), broadcast television (1927), computers (1949), cable television (1950), satellites (1957), ARPANET/Internet's start (1969), and the World Wide Web/Tim Berners-Lee (1991). Much of what was initially available on the Internet were web-distributed mass media publications illustrating McLuhan's concept of "Review-mirror" such that new technologies replicate older ones until their unique properties can be developed.

[39] "God is all-knowing and all-powerful. [God] is a spirit, not a body, and [God] exists both outside us and within us. God is always with us because [God] is everywhere. We can never fully understand [God] because [God] works in mysterious ways. In broad terms this describes the God of our [ancestors], but it also describes electronic media, the second god." Tony Schwartz. *Media: The Second God*. New York: Random House, 1981. 3.

[40] Even though the European printing press produced its first book in 1450 and after 50 years some 30,000-50,000 editions had been produced, it only took two weeks after Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses on the doors of Wittenberg castle church with the intent of an academic dialogue for some reform minded activists to publish and distribute them throughout Europe. Luke, 72.

[41] In response, at the same time as German Lutheranism embraced the individual's inner authority to relate to God through the Word, Catholics were admonished to rely on the "Church's" authority; Pope Leo X issued an edict in 1515 requiring imprimaturs for all "Catholic" publications and the Council of Trent (1545-1563) prohibited the distribution of vernacular bibles in all Catholic regions.

[42] Convinced that the sounds of his faith community should be shared with the country, a Westinghouse engineer who sang in his church choir helped Calvary Episcopal Church's Sunday Evening Prayer service became the first American religious broadcast in 1921. The National Council of Catholic Men, the Jewish Seminary of America and the

laudable; however, as with every technological advance, religious educators need to be aware of the expansion of both life-affirming as well as life-diminishing communicative characteristics.

By their nature, mass media share messages with mass audiences. Because they are used primarily for commercial ventures, mass media are typically designed to motivate consumers to buy products. When Christians use media that are partnered with commercial ventures, the Church's message is impacted by the demands and requirements of a commodity-oriented environment. Thus, within a broadcast and cablecast arena, "televangelists" need to maintain a particular level of viewership and funding in order to say on the air; To do so, they have to learn to diagnose spiritual hungers, to tailor their message to keep their audience and to "sell" salvation through veiled financial appeals. Compound this with the fact that while electronically distributed mass media have the *potential* to reach an audience of unprecedented size, the "sending" of a message does not guarantee that it is "heard;" still, churches continue to invest large amounts of financial and other resources for the production and distribution of audio and video programming. Finally, even if the message is heard, there is no guarantee that it is understood or that there is a community to provide an interpretive framework. To combat this issue, some mass media producers attempt to create a sense of community among audience members; however, the mass media are *passive* media. Viewers watch. Few, if any, opportunities exist for direct engagement and interaction with other audience members or with the producers, writers, actors, sponsors, etc. that make the message/program available. Within this mix, cultural values of consumption generally overpower any expression of Christian perspectives. As a result, churches that incorporate electronic mass media need to be cautious; they need to monitor the relationship between their explicit and implicit as well as espoused and operative messages.

4. Interactive Age

The Fourth Age of Human Communications dawned with the creation of digital technology and its language that can convert *any* data, voice and video into a series of 0s and 1s. Networked through miles of cable or processed through wireless transmitters and receivers, these computer-mediated communications are at the early stages of revolutionizing human communications and thus society through their interactive capacity. Like most new communications technologies, particularly at such an early stage of development[43], the Internet is replicating many of the characteristics of its predecessor; the majority of web sites currently resemble mass media with their unidirectional distribution of text and images. The paradigmatic impact will be recognized and felt when communicators capitalize on the new digital media's unique capacity for multidirectional exchange. No longer a source to be passively received,

Federation Council of Churches of Christ (now the NCCC) created the "heyday" of religious television programming when, as previously described, they worked with television networks to produce prime time programming in the 1950's. Mother Angelica was the first to establish a national Catholic Cable television presence in the early 1980s with her 24 hr a day Alabama-based Eternal World Television Network (EWTN). Even the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) moved into the satellite-distribution era in 1981 when they established the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America (CTNA) and distributed video programming for internal church use as well as cable distribution to the homes. Similarly, the Southern Baptist Conference established Baptist TelNet (BTN) and the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints began installing downlinks at congregational centers. Finally, on June 6, 1987 Tony Verna linked over 1.5 million people in 17 countries on 5 continents with 24 satellites and 30 transponders for an hour-long Prayer for World.

[43] There is common agreement that interactive audio was initiated 1876 with Graham Bell's telephone; however, the start of interactive multi-media delivery (voice, video and data) must be tied with the development of the computer. Some ground this evolution in 1936 with the development of the first mechanical calculator while others claim the 1940s (1944 for the first programmable computer, MARK I, and 1942-6 for the first all-electronic computer, ENIAC). If the Interactive Age is defined by the size of the group that could actually interact, dating must be tied to the emergence of the Internet (the Advanced Research Projects Agency was established in 1957 and began researching what became the Internet, 1964 was the first actual connection between humans and their computers or 1991 establishment of the World Wide Web.

these new communications technologies inherently enable (require) the sender and receiver(s) to exchange roles, communicate one-to-one or one-to-many around the corner and around the globe, in real time (synchronous) or delayed (asynchronous).

Since its inaugural issue in 2000, the Pew Internet and American Life project[44] has published over 40 reports tracking and analyzing Internet use within the United States and documents recognizable shifts that result from increased Internet use. These studies show that relatively minor aspects of daily life - watching television, shopping in stores, and reading printed newspapers have declined as "people increasingly turn to the Internet to perform work-related tasks, make purchases, do other financial transactions, write emails with weighty and urgent content, and seek information important to their everyday lives."[45] When faced with major events or decisions, Pew researchers learned that for millions of American Internet users the Internet was crucial or important in gaining critical training for advancement or a new job, negotiating car and home purchases, dealing with one's own or a loved-one's illness, making important decisions and transitioning through crises.[46] While these transformations are significant, there are even more revolutionary ones among young people.

In *Growing Up Digital,* Don Tapscott explores "the culture of interaction" and its impact upon the N-Gen[47] at play and work, with family and friends, as consumers and future leaders. Recognizing that young people are growing up in a very different era of human communications, he anticipates and documents subsequent shifts in who they are and how they relate.

> "A new youth culture is emerging… a new culture in the broadest sense, defined as the socially transmitted and shared patterns of behavior, customs, attitude, and tacit codes, beliefs and values, arts, knowledge and social forms. This new culture is…stemming from the N-Gen use of interactive digital media…With the advent of the Web, millions of children around the world are routinely gathering online to chat, sometimes to discuss a common interest such as sports or the guitar, but often with no specific purpose to the conversation other than to be with, and interact with, kids their own age. Instead of hanging out at the playground or variety store, or going home to watch TV, more and more kids are logging on to their computer and chatting with their buddies from as far away as the other side of the world and as close as next door."[48]

This culture is affecting 73% of US teenagers aged between 12 and 17 as they grow up regularly using the Internet for e-mail, "fun" surfing, visiting entertainment sites, using instant messaging (IM), and researching hobbies.[49] Along with the potential for global interaction and the inter-culturation that results from the Internet's lack of geographic boundaries, some theorists are speculating that online interaction and its continuous partial attention[50], non-linear sequencing, and multi-sensory operations are actually transforming the ways children think and

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[44] With the mission to "create and fund original, academic-quality research that explores the impact of the Internet on children, families, communities, the work place, schools, health care and civic/political life, the Project aims to be an authoritative source for timely information on the Internet's growth and societal impact, through research that is scrupulously impartial." http://www.pewinternet.org/about/about.asp?page=4

[45] John Horrigan. "Getting Serious Online." Washington DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, Mar 3, 2002. 2.

[46] Nathan Kommers. "Use of Internet at Major life Moments," Washington DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, May 8, 2002. www.pewinternet.org.

[47] "The term *Net Generation* refers to the generation of children who, in 1999, will be between the ages of 2 and 22, not just those who are on the Internet." Donald Tapscott. *Growing Up Digital.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998. 3.

[48] Tapscott, 55-56.

[49] Amanda Lenhart. "Teenage Life Online." Washington DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, June 20, 2001.

[50] Continuous partial attention – a term originally heard at the Harvard University 2000 Conference on Internet and Society to describe the phenomenon of computer users (predominantly teens) who have 5-7 Instant Messages open, while playing a game, listening to music from an online radio station and gathering research for a project.

learn. Building on insights from communications and educational theorists, Tapscott explores this in his chapter on "N-Gen Learning," providing an optimistic glimpse of the new media and their possibilities for the 21st century. Summarized in Figure 1,[51] he discusses the shift from broadcast (mass media) methodologies to interactive ones. Contrasting a more didactic, linear, hierarchical, instructional model with a constructive, serendipitous, egalitarian, collaborative one, Tapscott's analysis renders tracings of an enculturating community. Tapscott's model anticipates a hope-filled environment capable of transforming individuals and communities, much like Westerhoff's ecology that creates a Christian utopia.

BROADCAST		INTERACTIVE
Linear, Sequential, Serial	<->	Hypermedia
Instruction	<->	Construction/Discovery
Teacher-centered	<->	Learner-Centered
Absorbing Material	<->	Learning How to Learn
School	<->	Lifelong
One-size-fits-all (Factory Assembly Line)	<->	Customized
School as torture	<->	School as Fun
Teacher as transmitter	<->	Teacher as facilitator
FIGURE 1		

As any search engine will attest, there are thousands of theological and spiritual web sites in existence. Ranging from electronified church bulletins to multi-sensory worship experiences, it appears that religious educators and spiritual leaders have embraced the Interactive Age. One of the most unique and earliest pilgrimage spaces was created in January 1995, when Archbishop Jacques Gaillot was abruptly notified of his appointment at an ancient and fictitious see, Partenia in Algeria. In response as a virtual[52] Bishop, he established the first virtual diocese (www.ascens.org/ukantgai.htm) with parishioners spanning the planet. Others' creative uses include online-only churches (e.g. www.webstationone.com/fecha/default.htm), outreach for marginalized communities (e.g. www.OnceCatholic.org); online worship (e.g. www.ginghamsburg.com/video02/sep2202r.htm; www.emanuelnyc.org/seder/seder.html) www.ummah.net/software/cyber/); meditation experiences (e.g. www.buddhanet.net/metta.htm; and chants (e.g. www.christdesert.org/noframes/chant/chant.html). Even the Pope can be seen and heard through RealAudio and Streaming video (www.vatican.va). These sites continue the Christian tradition of incorporating emerging media to proclaim the word… but who hears it and does it have impact?

"Wired Churches, Wired Temples," another Pew report, is "believed to be the first survey of individual congregations and how they use the Internet" and indicates that "21% of Internet users have looked for religious or spiritual information online" making "the search for religious material[53] a more popular feature on the Internet than the performance of online banking (18% of users), participation in online auctions (15%), and online dating services (9%).[54] Focused on the experiences of Internet use *within* established churches and synagogues, the study related what Internet users liked: expanded *access* gained to

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[51] Tapscott. Figure 7.3, 139.
[52] Gaillot is quoted in The New Yorker as saying, "[T]he primitive Church was a kind of Internet, which was one of the reasons it was so difficult for the Roman Empire to combat it. The early Christians understood that what was most important was not to claim physical power in a physical place but to establish a network of believers--to be online."
[53] While interactive features were the "most valued spiritual activities to Religion Surfers ("prayer (85%), volunteer service (71%), communal worship (70%), and informal conversations with friends (69%)") and informational features (religious materials (13%)) were relatively low, most church web sites are predominantly informational. Elena Larsen. "Wired Churches, Wired Temples: Taking Congregations and Missions into Cyberspace." Washington DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, December 20, 2000. www.pewinternet.org.
[54] Larsen, "Wired," 6.

communities that felt "always on," particularly if they were shy and seeking guidance or counsel; readily available doctrinal, educational and support *resources*; and opportunities to *connect* with the community via email. A second report published a year later, "CyberFaith," confirms that "the Web allows the faithful wide access to resources and links, and it offers the doubtful or curious a safe place to explore."[55] More specifically documenting "religious surfers'" contexts, "CyberFaith" delineates four groups: people who practice religion in both a physical and virtual space (*Members*-84%), people who have left an institutional religion but still seek spiritual relationships (*Active Seekers*-27%), converts to a faith seeking doctrinal information (*Converts*-36%), and "those who feel isolated for their beliefs and find communion with others in cyberspace when they cannot find it in their own neighborhoods (*Outsiders*-12%)."[56] The most significant finding is that the majority of Religious Surfers *are active* within a religious community and that there is an ecological relation between virtual and physical communities:

> "By creating better ties within a pre-existing community, by creating a Web presence, and by facilitating discussions that can be difficult to hold in other settings, congregations tightened bonds within their groups, re-established connections with former members, and in some cases, expanded their missions on a global scale. Web sites may not create new communities, but communities can create vibrant web presences that redound to the benefit of their members."[57]

Implicit in the report is a call for an interpretive framework, community and/or individual. People who were already grounded in a faith community benefited the most from faith-based online interaction; people new to or marginalized from a tradition, needed guidance, mentoring and personalized outreach. Generally this is true for all those navigating the web.

While the Interactive Age is full of promise and the potential benefits of computer-mediated interaction are tremendous, there are constraints. In addition to some very significant *financial* (hardware, software, training, bandwidth, etc) *ethical* (privacy, virtual identities,[58] cyber theft, commercialism, behavioral norms, etc) and *moral issues* (access, the digital divide, priority, etc) individuals exploring these computer-mediated worlds often are confronted with a cacophony of resources that provide conflicting and/or contradictory information. Without an interpretive guide, they do not know how to recognize or discern valid and authentic sources. Tools once used to identify "authoritative" sources, like an imprimatur for a book, are meaningless in digital world where anyone can publish anything on a site with whatever claims for accuracy and authenticity they choose. What mediates this two edged sword of increased interaction and confused authenticity? What directs an ecological system?

The Essential Role of Religious Educators in an Interactive Age

When exploring an ecology, it is obvious that all the elements interact in equilibrium such that a change in any one aspect leads to a change of all; what is less clear is the manner in which a system maintains its direction and assures its course is true. To find this governor, recall, as Nardi and O'Day expressed, that one of the five elements of an ecological system is a keystone species, a "presence crucial to the survival of the ecology itself." This keystone

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[55] Elena Larsen. "CyberFaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online." Washington DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, December 23, 2001. www.pewinternet.org. 6.
[56] Larsen, "CyberFaith", 7, 9-12.
[57] Larsen, "CyberFaith," 21.
58 The fluidity of identity and the anonymity possible in a virtual context has evoked tremendous public concern. Notable for those working with young people are statistics documenting that 56% of online teens have more than one e-mail address or screen name and that within this group 24% say that one of those addresses or screen names is a secret one they use when they do not want their buddies to know they are online. Amanda Lenhart. "Teenage Life Online: The rise of the instant-messaging generation and the Internet's impact on friendships and family relationships." Washington DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, June 20, 2001.

species acts as an interpretive lens and guide by which the members of an environment learn and maintain a consistent course. Within a Christian faith-enculturating community, that guiding presence is the community's understanding of God as revealed through Jesus Christ which is maintained by people who both know the Story and are the Story: religious educators[59].

As Story-Keepers and Story-Makers, religious educators are responsible for many elements of a faith-enculturating community. As proclaimers, religious educators meld the Gospel message with appropriate methodologies and contemporary media so that the Word can be heard. As interpreters, religious educators attend with the eyes of faith and share their wisdom so that the Word can be understood and appropriated. Thus they continue the process - recorded in Scripture and church tradition, of *telling* the story of Jesus Christ, *inviting* individuals to embrace the story being told, and *encouraging* them to embrace it as a way to live as an individual and as a member of a Christian community while also *guiding* members' meaningful engagement with the Story and *catalyzing* its critical exploration. Without this dynamic interaction, ecological communities die.

Religious educators maintain the community's vitality by interjecting what Neil Postman calls the "thermostatic view."[60] Able to converse on all sides of an issue and expand notions of those with myopic vision, religious educators should have the preparation not only to initiate meaningful engagement with and critique of the community's Story but also to help community members navigate the chaos of applying its Wisdom in contemporary society. Typically tapping interpretive frameworks that include Scripture, church tradition, and empirical studies, these mentors and guides utilize *interactive* forms of communication (physically present face-to-face conversations and virtual mediated ones like videoconferencing, email, chat, etc.) to create opportunities for dialogue, listen to the Spirit speaking though them and support in members in their embrace of their baptismal initiation into the priesthood of believers and their commitment to be "full, conscious and active participants" in the life of the church.

With the dawn of the Interactive Age, Religious Educators have new communications technologies to combat "broken ecologies." By developing a hybrid model of physical and virtual engagement, religious communities can tap and maximize the strengths of each world thus empowering religious educators to overcome the physical restrictions of one to two hours on Sunday. While personal resistance and technological difficulties are the most often cited reasons for failure, the single most important factor for their successful implementation is an individual's readiness to fully engage in the mediated process. This may mean expanding notions of religious education to consider new methods and media for proclaiming the Good News. The primary requirement to leverage the opportunities presented is a little technological savvy (or friends with it) and the willingness to think outside the box.[61] The results will benefit a faith-enculturating community with additional interactive opportunities for faith formation as well as a language to speak meaningfully to the next (digital) generation.

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[59] Here, religious educators are professionals with specific knowledge and skills.

[60] "The stability and vitality if an environment depend not on what is *in* the environment but on the interplay of its elements; that is, on their diverse and dynamic complementarities….There is no change, development, or growth you can think of – at any level of organization – that will not soon turn lethal if there is no countervailing tendency in the system. All health is, in this sense, dependent on oppositional complementarity… The thermostatic view of education is, then, not ideology-centered. It is balance centered… It aims at all times to make visible the prevailing biases of a culture and then… to oppose them." Neil Postman. *Teaching as a Conserving Activity.* New York: Delacorte Press, 1979. 18, 20.

[61] Consider that prior to the elevator, architectural designs were constrained by the number of flights of stairs an average human could climb – typically three. When pulleys and cables were combined to produce the ability to lift weight, elevators were incorporated in short story buildings. It was not until a generation of new architects had grown up with the elevator as a standard reference in their repertoire that the notion of building skyscrapers was possible.