The internet kills community! Except when it doesn't.

By [MaryAnn McKibben Dana](#)
February 27, 2012

Two articles crossed my screen recently about the Internet and its effect on community. First:

## [Whenever Two or More Are Gathered... Online](#) — Sojourners

My editor passed along this link in response to some of stuff I wrote in [Sabbath in the Suburbs](#)
about my experience taking a tech Sabbath each weekend. The article describes a very vibrant, supportive community that formed via Facebook in the wake of a friend's death in Iraq.

I noted that there was a physical dimension to the community—it did not take place solely online; in fact the author actually moved so she could live closer to several community members. Certainly there are online communities that get along and get deep without ever meeting face to face… but most of the ones I've been a part of are either physical friendships that are kindled and stoked online, or online friendships that deepen to the point that people want to meet face to face. Examples of the former include my group of friends from Rice, who have had an e-mail list for going on 20 years now. Examples of the latter include the RevGalBlogPals and the Young Clergy Women, both of whom have annual conferences now.

~

Second is this article about digital Sabbath that my mother sent me:

## [We Don't Need a Digital Sabbath; We Need More Time](#) — Atlantic

The blurb summarizing the article says, *What if our technology isn't the problem? A look at "Digital Sabbaths" and the dangers of holding our gadgets responsible.*

But the article isn't really about that. I thought from that description that the article would pooh-pooh tech sabbaths, but in fact it's a fairly good synopsis of the ins and outs of them. Here is the vital bit:

> When we make a Sabbath and push back against the many claims on our time, we are, in some ways, rebelling against this speed-up and the intrusion of work and labor into our domestic sphere...
>
> It's for all these reasons that a Sabbath, digital or otherwise, can be reinvigorating. When we take a day away from our tools and create a day entirely under our own control, we create that "palace in time" where we can meet our friends and family and, finally, connect.
>
> If one concedes the point that a Sabbath for restorative reasons need not proscribe technology, it may seem pointless to argue against the digital sabbath. What's the harm?
>
> **The reason is that if we allow ourselves to blame the technology for distracting us from our children or connecting with our communities, then the solution is simply to put away the technology. We absolve ourselves of the need to create social, political, and, sure, technological structures that allow us to have the kinds of relationships we want with the people around us.** We need to realize that at the core of our desire for a Sabbath isn't a need to escape the blinking screens of our electronic world, but the ways that work and other obligations have intruded upon our lives and our relationships.

I think that's a little facile, and this issue of "blaming the technology" is strange. Yes, putting away the phones and iPads isn't enough to make a radical change in one's life and world. But I'm almost willing to say that radical change is impossible _without_ putting them away now and then.

I think about this from an incarnational point of view, which comes from my faith tradition: **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.** Technology, by and large, connects us with people across the miles (which is valuable) but it distracts us from the physical world immediately around us. Setting aside these gadgets is the first step to reconnecting with the real fleshy people right there with us.

*Originally posted at [The Blue Room](The Blue Room)*