

Low tech: Membership lists in a shoe box

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [August 23, 2003](#) issue

I am not a high-tech person. That's partly due to age, partly to disposition. The very mention of my technological skills sets my colleagues and family to snickering. I never thought I'd be an anachronism and I'm not particularly proud of it. But I do find myself resisting some of the places the new technology wants to take me. So I appreciate David Wood's [interview with Albert Borgmann](#), who has been thinking about how technology shapes a culture and a way of life. He urges us to put bounds on our use of technology.

That makes me think, of course, about the importance of turning off the television. And it makes me think about the omnipresence of cell phones. I'm not the only preacher whose homiletical momentum has been brought to a halt by a ringing cell phone. The best, or worst, incident happened recently during a wedding rehearsal. As we were practicing the vows, the groom's phone rang. He extracted it from his coat pocket, answered and handed it to the bride. "It's for you," he said.

I know the blessing and the curse. The church's software system sometimes sends "please pay your pledge" notices to church members who died several years ago. (My colleagues roll their eyes when I remind them that things like that didn't happen when we kept the membership lists on 3 x 5 cards in a shoe box.) Sometimes e-mail capability encourages people to say more than they should to each other.

On the other hand, the e-mail daily devotions that arrive on members' computer screens extend and deepen the community of faith. The church can communicate with members, boards and committees with an ease and efficiency that are amazing and certainly enhance a sense of community. Several of our church members were among the first troops to go to Iraq, and we were able to communicate with them and extend pastoral care in a new and wonderful way.

As Borgmann suggests, it's important to set limits. I plan to hold tightly to what Borgmann calls "focal" activities that define your life at its best and most

authentic—like reading, eating and talking with the people you love, walking in the early morning, writing a letter, reading a book. And I don't really want to go back to the shoebox and the 3 x 5 cards.