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**Sensual Prayer—Electronic Context
 Ignatian Prayer for Internet Users
 by Reverend John M. Staudenmaier, SJ**

The electronic media have changed the way we live and think and feel. They are not the only important influence in life, of course; any part of life that changes us deeply becomes by that fact, an important place to meet God. Which disciplines of prayer can help us meet God in the electronic dimensions of life?

We live in a tension between the places where our bodies are present and a network of electronic communication systems. It is a tension that characterizes the world of our consciousness and it confronts us with the unavoidable task of learning to integrate the two. I want to argue here that we cannot negotiate the networked world of electronic symbols, a world so fluid and vast that it threatens to dwarf our tiny physical presence in the world, unless we find *places* where our bodies and imaginations, minds and memories can give the vast range of networked symbols a grounding in discerning human consciousness.

Living a life where personal integrity thrives on a diet rich in electronic messages is remarkably challenging... If we hold to the Catholic tradition of God's affection for the humanly-constructed world and God's commitment to our gradual conversion, we will approach the networked dimension of our lives, its opportunities and its burdens, with affection and with respect for the conversions we will need to live it gracefully. However, given the power of the network-body tension... I think we must also learn how to find sensual places that can nourish us in the hard labor of interpreting what we electronically send and receive. Finding nourishing places in a webbed world, that is where Ignatius' rules for sensual prayer can help us the most in the present world. Their purpose... is to help us locate the specific and even physical place where I desire to be met by God. (Continued on Page 2)



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"The conversions we will surely need to live in the current world gracefully will come to us gradually if we approach electronic media neither with breathless awe nor with sour distaste, but with an affection for the human condition beloved of God."

John Staudenmaier, SJ

Sensual Prayer—Electronic Context (Continued from Page 1)

Let us turn to the Ignatian rules briefly and interrogate them in light of the challenges of a networked life. ...How should I live in a world so wide that it challenges the smaller world of my body and my personal presence? How live with the ambivalences that stem from the editing I do about my own news, the editing I know others do about their news? When I encounter so many crafted messages, all aiming to capture some bit of my attention, how do I find remedy for routine burnouts? How can I live between the slippery world of networked messages and the world of my body in an integrated and not a schizoid way? How find the best times to savor messages, to differentiate those that need care, those that simply delight me, and those I can ignore? How find places to play, pray, and be cared for so that my imagination comes back to the networked world refreshed?

It has seemed to me... that the *Spiritual Exercises* offer us a remarkable set of disciplines for living in a more than networked way. What we need most of all is a discerning sensitivity to our sensual selves. Following my consolations and desolations... to the place I desire to pray, staying until I am satisfied, being glad to be surprised: by these habits of prayer Ignatius encourages us to interpret our experience of the world and especially to sense when we need to pause and where. Knowing when to surf (a lovely word here) the pulsing electronic networks available to me and when to pause and contemplate; that looks to be a central requirement for living in a networked era.



We should not conclude, however, without turning the question of prayer around a little. Besides asking how I might find the place where I desire to pray, should we not also ask ourselves how such places might be provided in the high pressure networked worlds we negotiate? Here I am thinking like a Benedictine perhaps. The places we need for prayer in the networked world cannot depend completely on individual creativity. Given the pressures of the present world, that's just too much work. We need to give and receive welcome.



Consider two ways that hospitality can help us to pray. The first has to do with physical welcome, caring for my home or my place of work so that people who come in know that their presence matters to me—I am thinking here of cleaning and cooking and inviting and listening, all the deft ancient labors of hospitality. Few experiences restore me when I am worn down more than knowing unmistakably that you want me here in your place...to hear what I have to say... to tell me your stories in return,...to eat what you have prepared. It is not by accident that our tradition of following Jesus places the meal and table at the center of our worship. In a world tempted to hurry too much, welcoming one another gets more important rather than less. Perhaps one of the disciplines of prayer can be found here, preparing welcoming times and places set aside for listening to one another's unimportant stories, and by listening, to savor one another's beauty.

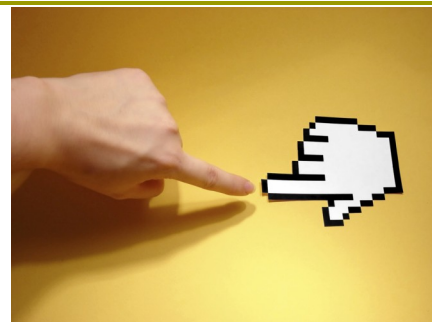
Second, and perhaps a bit more of a reach, we might look at our electronic habits and ask how we can create internet places (even telephone places) where the relationship between what is said and the one who says it is trustworthy. Perhaps we could include more of our immediate context in our emails and phone calls, welcoming those who receive our messages into the context from which we send them. Perhaps we could become more alert to our habitual little deceptions about the contexts from which we network. The habit of allowing myself to be accessible, if I stay faithful to it over a long time, might educate the people who communicate with me electronically to expect welcome and freedom from deceit even in mundane business matters. This is counter cultural indeed, what with the many alarms in the news about web and email fraud and I do not counsel naiveté. Just the opposite. I cannot make myself accessible in electronic forums without skill in discerning the messages I send and receive, the very sort of discernment that comes from the habits of prayer at the center of this article. (Continued on Page 3)



Sensual Prayer—Electronic Context (Continued from Page 2)

Hospitality, whether I am offering it or receiving it, comes from and renews an intimate life of presence that is the essence of discernment.

Finding my way to a place of prayer, welcoming the people of my life into places of hospitality, letting myself be welcomed in return, these disciplines are within our reach. They would go a long way toward easing the media fatigue brought on by networked intensity. The disciplines of prayer, “sensual” as I am calling them, all require that we care for the relationship between the ground of our experience and the play of symbols in an electronic world order. In imitation of Jesus’ enduring affection for the human world, we must approach the electronic technologies with affection more than awe, recognizing them as tools that are helpful for some things and inhibiting for others. As with all tools, it helps to respect their capacities and limitations and to learn how to weave my use of them into the larger fabric of my life and its loves.



From the Editor’s Desk

Sister Sherryl White, CSJ, Ph.D., Psychologist, Pittsburgh, PA

This past weekend, while enjoying the last cook-out of summer, a group of us began talking about music. One sister said, “I think I need to expand my tastes. I feel so out of date.” Everyone laughed, agreeing that not just music, but the whole world seemed to be passing us by. Before long, we’d created a list of technological challenges as long as your arm, from trying to master a television’s remote control device to setting alarms on digital clocks. Daily “conveniences,” we said, were better labeled as “hurdles.”

While driving home that night, I began to think about our fall issue of “Engaging Aging” and its focus on technology. All along I’ve been resistant to devoting an entire issue to the topic. I just never associated technology with elders. I kept thinking the famous “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up” button was about as far as we’d be able to go with the topic. How could a consideration of technology possibly be of value if so many of us are inept in its advancements?

But upon reflection, the better question seems, “How could it not?” Immersed as we are in a culture of technology, I suggest that we have a responsibility to consider deeply its implications for our lives and the care of elders.

The articles in this issue may only brush the surface of the vast field of technology and its sub-specialty, gerontechnology, but I hope you’ll find yourself starting to ask some important questions. For example, are the standards for access to computers the same in our retirement

facilities as for those members living in active ministry? Have we fully availed ourselves of the advances that enable communication for hearing impaired persons? Beyond defensive driving updates, have we considered adaptive devices in our cars that would enable elders to safely continue driving? Are there any programs in place to educate elders about how to use electronic devices available to them? Sometimes just activating voice mail and retrieving messages seem to require a degree in engineering! Could electronic memory devices be a support for cognitively impaired members?

On yet a deeper level, is technology the magic solution for an improved quality of life? It has been suggested that there is a growing “digital divide” between those who can afford such devices and those who cannot. Might this divide also manifest itself between those who know how to use the gadgets and those who don’t? How do we hold on to the “human” touch? How does technology influence our spiritual life?

As usual, I enjoy imagining the lively conversations that “Engaging Aging” might evoke among our readers. I hope you’ll take time to share your thoughts with us. In the meantime, may these coming days of fall encourage us as we move through our own seasons of change. May all be well!



High-Tech Solutions to Aging-in-Place Dilemmas

by Nell Bernstein, *Caring.com* senior editor

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is reprinted with permission from *Caring.com* © 2009. Although it is directed to adults with aging parents, we found the suggestions applicable to religious as well. Our reprint permission did not include the right to edit, so we suggest that you make your own substitutions, e.g., "brothers/sisters" for "parents," as you read.



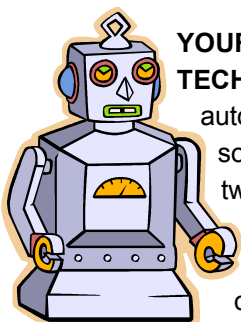
Ninety-five percent of people 75 and older say they want to stay in their homes indefinitely. This desire for independence is perfectly natural, but for their children, it's also a recipe for worry -- that they'll fall, forget to take their meds, or just need assistance. You can make your parents' home far safer and more comfortable by investing in some of the new devices aimed at elders who have made the choice to "age in place."

Solutions for safety worries: "Seniors can really get in trouble because they feel like they're losing their grip on independence," says Susan Ayers Walker of Smart Silvers Alliance. Ayers monitors technological advances aimed at helping seniors hold on to their independence as they age. These technologies also help the children of aging parents, who worry that Mom is going to fall down the stairs, leave the stove on, or forget to take her medication if no one is around to notice.

Here's a worry-by-worry guide to some innovations -- several tested and recommended by Walker -- that can make all the difference if you're concerned about your live-alone parents' safety or just their day-to-day ease of living.

YOUR WORRY: My parents won't be able to reach me in an emergency.

TECH SOLUTION: Big-button cell phone. According to the Pew Research Center, many seniors won't use a cell phone even in an emergency. They find them too complex, can't manage the tiny buttons, or can't read the screens. A big-button phone like the Jitterbug (\$147), designed specifically for seniors, could give you and your parents peace of mind. It's an easy-open clamshell with extra-loud speakers, big backlit buttons, a bright screen with easy-to-read numbers, and a straightforward service contract (at an additional cost). The Jitterbug One-Touch takes simplicity a step further, with just three big, impossible-to-miss buttons -- one for 911; one for the operator, who will connect your parent to anyone she wants to reach; and one preprogrammed to connect your parents to you or another family member. Such phones cost \$10 to \$80 per month for the service plan in addition to the cost of the phone.



YOUR WORRY: My parents can't clean the house.

TECH SOLUTION: House-cleaning robots. This one isn't as Jetson as it sounds -- the iRobot family of automated cleaners (\$120 to \$500) is available at your local big-box store. Although you could hire someone to clean your parents' home, Walker points out that being able to vacuum on their own in between visits from the cleaner goes a long way toward restoring your parents' sense of dignity and control. If a box of cereal spills, they can let the tiny, effective iRobot Roomba handle it with the push of a button, rather than struggling with an upright vacuum. The Scooba, which washes floors on its own, can prevent your parents from slipping and falling while trying to keep them clean, and the Looj, the rain-gutter cleaning robot, can, over time, save on the cost of having a handyman do the job.

YOUR WORRY: My parents will zone out, let the shower get too hot, and get burned.

TECH SOLUTION: Temperature-activated flow reducer. It's relatively low-tech and can cost less than \$40, but this gadget sure does work (search for it online using the key words temperature-activated flow reducer). A screw-on faucet attachment prevents burns by shutting off the water from a sink or shower if it gets too hot.

YOUR WORRY: My parents won't remember to take their medications -- or they'll take the wrong ones.

TECH SOLUTION: Automatic pill reminders. By the time a person reaches age 70, (Continued on Page 5)

High-Tech Solutions to Aging-in-Place (Continued from Page 4)

says Walker, she's probably taking about 12 medications. The inability to take them unsupervised accounts for up to 40 percent of nursing home admissions. Fortunately, many devices available now can remind your parents to take their pills and keep them from getting their prescriptions scrambled. These range from pillboxes with alarms and timers to services that will send your parents medication reminders by phone, e-mail, or pager. MD.2, for example, is a monitored dispenser that you or a caregiver can load and refill, and your parents can dispense all their pills right on time, with one touch of a button. Rescue Alert will monitor your parents' pillbox electronically and alert a dispatcher if the lid isn't opened when it's supposed to be. Do an Internet search for medication reminder for a tour of the many options and find the one that's the best fit for your parents. Prices vary.

YOUR WORRY: My parents will burn themselves cooking, or leave the stove on and start a fire.

TECH SOLUTION: The Safe-T-element Cooking System. This device consists of cover plates you can install over existing stovetop burners that limit how hot they can get and automatically shut off the stove if they reach a certain temperature. Prices vary.

YOUR WORRY: My parents will fall and won't be able to get up.

TECH SOLUTION: Personal Emergency Response System (PERS). These home devices connect your parents to a 24-hour call center with a push of the button. The transmitter can be worn on a neck pendant or bracelet and sends a signal to the call center via a receiver connected to your parents' home phone line. Your parent can push the button after a fall or any kind of emergency and the call center will contact you or emergency personnel as appropriate. PERS can be purchased or leased, and prices vary widely. Expect to pay \$200 to \$1,500 if your parents want to own their system, plus a small monthly monitoring fee. Rentals, which usually include monitoring, average \$15 to \$50 a month. Lots of companies sell PERS; one way to find one in your area is to do an online search that includes your state or region.



YOUR WORRY: My hard-of-hearing parents will miss phone calls or leave visitors standing outside the door.

TECH SOLUTION: Doorbell-telephone flashing-light signaler. If your parents are getting hard of hearing, a device that enables a ringing doorbell or phone to trigger a flashing light -- including existing house lamps and special strobes for rooms where lamps aren't generally used -- lets them know when they have a call or visitors have arrived. Search for one online using terms such as doorbell and hard of hearing. Such gizmos usually cost \$70 and up for doorbell only; \$110 for doorbell and phone. \$1,000 (www.exmocare.com).



YOUR WORRY: I can't be there all the time -- how will I know my parents are OK?

TECH SOLUTION: Monitoring systems. A number of high-tech monitoring systems on the market now do what you can't: watch over your parents to make sure that nothing out of the ordinary is happening -- and report in to you, your computer, or a dispatcher when something does (for example, one of your parents goes into the bathroom and still hasn't come out an hour later). They usually cost about \$200, plus a monthly monitoring fee of about \$100. Some, like the QuietCare Plus work with any PERS your parents already have but add motion detection and also monitor whether the house gets too warm or too cold. All this information is sent to a website that you can check any time, but QuietCare representatives are also on the lookout for anything out-of-the ordinary. Obviously, to avoid having your parents see you as Big Brother, you'll need to discuss the idea and make sure they're OK with it before buying. Similarly, the E-Neighbor System is programmed to detect unusual activity in the home. A shower left running or a fridge that goes unopened for a day could trigger a phone call to you or a caregiver. Such devices cost about \$300 plus \$20 per month for emergency call center service.

The GrandCare Como adds a new twist: It reprograms your parents' television via the Internet to monitor their well-being and, unlike other systems, acts as a two-way street, creating a customized "channel" through which you can send photos of grandchildren and coordinate a calendar with caregivers. Prices vary.

Artists



Sr. Joan Marie Engel, SSSF

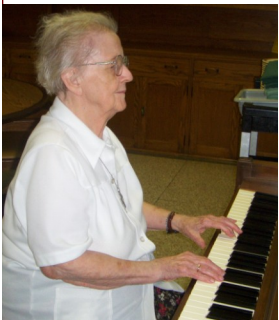
Sr. Helen Kerrigan, BVM



Sr. Leo Rita Volk, FSM



Sr. Margaret Miller SSMN



Sr. Marianelle Lies SSSF



SCSC Srs. Benedicta Berger & Jeanne d'Arc Kilwein



RSCJ Srs. Nita Villere, Mamie Jenkins, and Rose Chen



Sr. Mary Rassley, IHM



CPPS Srs. Gregory Heggeman & Bernadette Kleine



Sr. Phyllis Manterneah, OSF

& Artisans



Sr. Mildred Rieber SSSF



Sr. Mary D. Schmidt, SCSC



Sr. Mary Munch, RSCJ



Sr. Leona, OSF



Sr. Mary Reiter, CSJ



Sr. Genevieve Grandstetter, CDP



Sr. Gemma Godeck, CSJ

Aging Engaged



Brother Francis Deibel, SM

Praise God! Five to six hours each day at the computer may sound like a nightmare for some people, but for Marianist Brother Francis Deibel, “it’s just great, praise God!” And if that surprises you, consider this: Brother Frank, as he prefers to be called, is 101 years of age.

Research is showing that computer use among elders is growing by leaps and bounds. Just recently, the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that internet use among 70-75 year olds increased from 26% to 45% in the past four years. Clearly, the notion that elders are fearful of technology is an age-related stereotype.

For 48 years, Brother Frank ministered as a librarian at the University of Dayton. Now a resident at Mercy Siena in Dayton, he continues to be a source of information for people, corresponding regularly with over 100 contacts using email. “I’m not very original,” he said, “so I usually just send along things that I find of interest: news articles, pictures, whatever I think they might like to know about.” It’s clear that he knows his way around the technical terminology of “contact lists,”

“attachments,” and “forwarding protocols.” “Of my 100 contacts, I’d say that I get replies pretty regularly from about 25 people every day.” That’s a social network worth celebrating.

Daily contact with friends and colleagues on the internet keeps Brother Frank busy, but it was obvious during the interview that he’s not just hiding behind a screen all day. “Do you know Brother Norbert?” he asked me. “He died this morning. He was a good friend.” In the moments of silence that followed, I was moved by the deep sense of community that he values in his life.

“You know”, he mused, “I never asked for this, to be 101, but, praise God, I feel fine, and I thank God for my life. I enjoy being in touch with people; I go outside for walks every day; I go to Chapel for Mass; I have a computer in my room. Everything’s all set.”

When asked what he’d like to say to our readers, he paused, then offered, “Don’t be afraid of the computer. It’s the same as using a typewriter. Older people know how to do that. So they can use a computer too. It has changed my life.”

What better rejoinder than “Praise God!”

NRRO Calendar

Sept. 28-30: Planning and Implementation Workshop in Marriottsville, MD

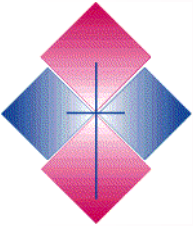
Oct. 20-23: RCRI National Conference; Atlanta, GA

December 12-13: Retirement Fund for Religious National Collection Date

December 31: Direct Care Assistance Application Forms for 2010 Mailed to Treasurers of Religious Institutes (and also available online at usccb.org/nrro)

2010

Jan. 22-24: Planning and Implementation Workshop (site to be determined)



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The National Religious Retirement Office coordinates the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious and distributes this money to eligible religious institutes for their retirement needs.

The National Religious Retirement Office supports, educates and assists religious institutes in the U.S. to embrace their current retirement reality and to plan for the future.

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