Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson,

*Click 2 Save: The Digital Ministry Bible*


http://click2savebook.com/

Reviewer: Dr Bex Lewis, CODEC, Durham University

*Click 2 Save: The Digital Ministry Bible* is designed as a practical resource guide for Christian leaders “who want to enrich and extend their ministries using digital media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and church or personal blogs”. The focus is upon Christian leaders, particularly those who are digital novices, because the attitude of church leadership and their confidence in using digital media are important factors in their role as gatekeepers or encouragers for their congregations to use these tools.

An important emphasis in the book is upon engagement, rather than just being engaging, and a stress on the quality not quantity of online relationships. Many church leaders over-focus on the ‘terms of engagement’ (the boundaries, the time to spend, which platforms), rather than on actually engaging (p62). Most congregations simply want “a pastor who’s down to earth, that they know cares about them”, and the particularity of ministry online is that it is “networked and relational rather than broadcast and numerical” (p46). The authors do not see effective online engagement as a substitute for other action for declining churches, but they argue that the revitalization of churches is related “to the ability of leaders in ministry to engage people exactly where they are” (p19) – which increasingly includes the online spaces.

Elizabeth Drescher, an academic researcher and writer on spiritual practices based at Santa Clara University, previously wrote *Tweet if You Heart Jesus* (which I reviewed in 2012 for this journal), whilst Keith Anderson is a Lutheran pastor and popular blogger on religion and popular culture. I found Drescher’s previous book to be a good mix of theory and practice, and I have
commend it to others who want to understand why digital ministry is so crucial for the church in this day and age.

*Tweet if You Heart Jesus* was largely theoretical, and an argument for why ministers need to get involved. *Click 2 Save* works alongside it well as a more practical guidebook as to what to use, when, and how within a church context. The book underlines ‘why’ those in church leadership would take the time to do social media within a busy ministry: as Pastor Clint Schnekloth puts it, “Think of what you’re doing in social media as ministry, not commentary on it, not ancillary to it” (p87). The book is enthusiastic about the opportunities of digital ministry and presents a strong challenge to those who are not using social media, with a call to be incarnational (fully-present) online: “sharing your story and your passions, being present and active in social media, humanises you” (p71). A lack of online engagement sends the message that you’re not interested in full-life relationships, and that means you are opening up a space for others to tell your story for you, instead of telling it yourself.

*Click 2 Save* acknowledges that “authenticity” is an overused word, but identifies it as important in the social media world. Authenticity is “the choice to show up and be real” (p63). The digital has changed what it is possible to experience, including religious conversations, which we can engage with 24/7, asynchronously, behind the protection of a screen, in a way that we can’t face-to-face.

The authors correctly point out that much church social media training focuses upon negative reputational management (seeking to find and erase negative material online), and encourage church leaders to instead seek to engage wholeheartedly with the conversations already happening amongst their congregations (whether that be online or offline). The authors demonstrate a shared idealism for truly engaging communities, encouraging leaders to move on from seeing the digital as simply a faster or cheaper way of broadcasting a message to grasp the true possibilities of ‘social engagement’ offered by social media. Leaders are encouraged to focus on areas of genuine passion, and whilst inviting online spaces can be created, it’s also important to allow plenty of time to go out and spend time in the digital spaces of others.

If we hold to the idea that church is about the people within it, rather than the organization itself, then churches need to create spaces where meaningful relationships can develop. People aren’t passively waiting for news that the church broadcasts, but they are connected with their friends, and may respond to authentically shared content. As pastors become involved in the lives of their congregations 24/7, they are more likely to be connected real-time in the difficult moments in
their congregations’ lives, rather than only meeting at services. People need to know that you care before they’ll engage with anything you’re trying to say, rather than feeling like a project awaiting religious conversion.

For pastors this may require letting go of elements of ‘traditional’ authority, and defining new boundaries, as increasingly personal aspects of lives are shared, and an aspect of ‘voice’ found that works in the digital arena. Drescher and Anderson highlight the difference between the ‘personal’ and the ‘private’: the ‘personal’ humanizes you, through sharing public thoughts on books you are reading, or your cat, while the ‘private’ can include oversharing details of your private life. Pastors are also cautioned to have an eye on self-care - a real emphasis on understanding the value of how you are spending your time, including online.

The book draws on a range of real-life, up-to-date examples, such as #prayformuamba (a popular hashtag in the UK in 2012, encouraging prayer for football player Fabrice Muamba), as it encourages those in the church (both leaders and their congregations) to listen to, participate in, and contribute to the world. Those in church leadership are encouraged to appreciate how the digital has changed the possibilities open to them, and to understand typical modern marketing models, whilst recognising that churches are not offering a product, but relationships.

Tips are separated into Novice (beginner), Oblate (initiated member), and Superior (expert), which I got the gist of, but not being particularly familiar with those terms (which we were told we would be) I would have preferred the use of terms such as ‘beginner’. The acronym ‘LACE’ (Listen (getting to know others), Attend (being present in conversations), Connect (reaching out), Engage (networking and collaboration)) could prove useful to some, although it’s not necessarily my cup of tea. I love some of the creative ideas, such as using Foursquare check-ins to show what ministers do do each day, although I was looking for warnings regarding privacy on pastoral visits. The book finishes with a useful glossary of terms.

Overall, the book strongly identifies the importance and value of ministry online. The style of writing is friendly, with lots of activity boxes and some cheerful illustrations. With an emphasis on practicality, the book also draws on theological thinking and spiritual practices and identifies how Christian activity in digital media can differentiate from standard ‘marketing advice’, especially in its purpose.

The book will be of value to those who want to understand what the world looks like in a digital age, and how to participate in it in the most effective manner. It is designed for those in ministry, but will also be of value to those in the laity, who I would like to have seen as emphasized...
of more importance. To be fair, the book does make mention of the ‘priesthood of all believers’, but these are then described as informal ministers of the church, which I’m a little uncomfortable with. Certainly ordained ministers can’t do it all, but I would see the congregation as disciples, rather than ministers, and much of the book’s content does seem to deal with the formal ministerial role. The book is not a theological tome, or an academic treatise, nor is it a technical textbook, but it is a useful book to think about using social media more strategically from positions of leadership. Those who understand the digital world already may find themselves skipping over some of the more basic sections, but may also find helpful arguments to persuade others who are still skeptical about the use of such technology.