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THE INTERNET AND EVANGELISM – THE EXPANDING MISSION FIELD

[INTERNET EVANGELISM COALITION ANNUAL MEETING](#) DISCUSSES ONLINE MINISTRY

(30 September 2004, Chicago, IL) “The strategy of the Great Commission is not that they come to us – but that we go to them,” said Dr. Sterling Huston, chair of the Internet Evangelism Coalition, as he addressed the IEC Annual Meeting earlier this month in Chicago. Dr. Huston underscored the wonderful opportunity offered by the Internet for denominations and ministries to go into the digital marketplace – pointing to hope and answers to life needs through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

EVANGELISM ONLINE

As part of the IEC meeting, participants heard from a number of Internet Evangelism practitioners including Andrew Careaga (www.e-vangelism.com) who said the recent trend toward Internet blogging offers Christians a way to share their ideas and point people to Christ by beginning conversations on topics with a broad interest. Cheryl Wilhelmi, Project Manager of www.Troubledwith.com a ministry of Focus on The Family, emphasized that they seek to help people in the midst of life change, challenge and crisis by extending immediate help and long term hope in Christ. Dennis Fierbach, VP of Information Technology for Campus Crusade for Christ Canada, reported that the www.TruthMedia.com sites have over 750,000 visits a month, with some 1,000 people a month making a decision for Christ. TruthMedia is assisted by 350 online volunteers and over 800 prayer supporters. Greg Outlaw, CEO/President, www.AllAboutGOD.com Ministries pointed to search engine optimization as a tool to reach out. By working to be at the top of the search engine search on targeted words, he said, they are able to link good information on topics of interest with the clear message of Christ.

Richard Post, Editor-in-Chief of "Why Jesus?" (www.eo.nl) from the Netherlands gave an overview of "Why Jesus?" a four-week online Alpha Course based on the Dutch Alpha Course. Now in its fourth year "Why Jesus?" is spreading to other countries and a youth version will be launched next year in cooperation with Youth for Christ. “Why Jesus?” uses over 100 e-coaches who provide support for people using the course. Eric Celer, Head Manager of the French web site www.TopChrétien.com says France can be considered a “spiritual third-world nation” because of the millions who don’t know Christ. Top Chretien is a portal for evangelism in the French-speaking world and has had over 7-million visitors in five years. Calvin Conkey, Director of www.CreateInternational.com Australia, gave an overview of their ministry online that includes web sites that reach specific religious groups including Hindus and mystics.

FUTURE OF THE INTERNET

By 2005, an estimated one-billion people will be online. What they access varies depending on age, gender, ethnicity and other factors. According to Lee Rainie, Director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, one thing they are exploring is religion. Speaking to the IEC meeting, Rainie reported that 64 percent of Americans currently online have used the Internet for religious or spiritual information. He added that while many ministries are capturing the potential of the Internet, they need to keep in mind the “digital divides” that affect how and why people access the Internet. Those digital divides include:

1. Age – young people are online more
 2. Employment status - students dominate the Internet
 3. Socio-economic status – wealthy people have more access to the Internet
 4. Disability – many disabled people are not able to get online
 5. Language - English is dominant on the Internet, but predictions indicate that Chinese will soon surpass English
 6. Community type – suburban residents are more likely to be online than urban residents
 7. Parental status – adults with children are more likely to recognize the importance of computers and access to the Internet
 8. Race and ethnicity – minorities are not online as much as Caucasians
 9. Personal outlook – the more positive a person feels about themselves, the more they will be online
- Rainie concluded by saying that “people do online what matters most to them offline” and that offers great potential for expanding ministry online.

INTERNET EVANGELISM FUTURE

IEC participants agree that Christians are just scratching the surface of the potential of the Internet for evangelism. The call from the IEC meeting was for Christian web sites to rethink online services in light of their evangelism potential and how to help fulfill the Great Commission through the Internet. In order to do so, the conclusion was that thousands of missionaries are needed for the field of the Internet. Many ministries are coming to the forefront with training for online evangelism including the IEC (<http://bgc.gospelcom.net/iec/otoe/index.php>) and TruthMedia (<http://training.truthmedia.com>).

Next year’s IEC Annual Meeting will be held in September in Chicago, IL..

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the IEC, please go to www.webevangelism.com or call 630.752.5156.

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MEDIA NOTE

For assistance in scheduling an interview concerning the Internet Evangelism Coalition, please contact Naomi Frizzell at 904.262.5202 or by email at naomi@webevangelism.com.