Digital Evangelism with e-Sword (Part 1)

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One of the most effective means of evangelism is, of course, pulpit preaching and classroom teaching for both Sunday School and Bible Study classes. With all the focus we put on reaching folks outside the local church, we sometimes forget that not everyone who attends worship and other activities with us each week is necessarily a committed believer already, even if they have attended church since birth.

Pastors preach every Sunday (at least) and oftentimes lead a mid-week Bible Study, while Sunday School teachers teach every week (usually) and itinerant evangelists preach and teach as often as they can wherever they can. One of the best tools for both sermon and lesson preparation is a handy software program called e-Sword by Rick Meyers (www.e-sword. net). For the next few issues of CCMAG, I'd like to write a series of articles highlighting the several different ways we can use e-Sword for digital evangelism, not only in the local church

but also in the world at large.

Perhaps the best part about obtaining and using e-Sword is that it's FREE! In fact, Rick strictly forbids the selling or reselling of his software, though he does ask for donations to support the ongoing ministry of e-Sword (www.e-sword.net/support.html). In return, he will send you a CD with practically everything on it so you don't have to spend a lot of time downloading it.

I've been using e-Sword for so long now that I can't even remember the first time I tried

it, but I believe it was due to an article I read in the early days of CCMAG that turned me on to it. For the first several years, though, I used it strictly for fast searching of Scripture passages (when I could remember a part of the text but not where it is found) and comparing the hyperlinked tool tips of the Greek and Hebrew words in Strong's Concordance with the various English translations of the Bible. That truly has been a blessing to me!

As I became more familiar with the various aspects of e-Sword's capabilities, such as the Topic Notes editor in particular (though I don't consider myself an expert at using the software, by any means), I longed to input all my collected sermon outlines into printable typeface format so my points would be clearer and easier to read during my preaching. By that time, however, I had so many handwritten sermon outlines in my files that it truly was a daunting task. It still is, in fact. Nevertheless, just two or three years ago I finally decided to begin typing my sermon outlines into separate e-Sword Topic Notes files as I "re-preached" them or as I prepared new ones, and I revised certain words and phrases in my outline points on the "old ones" as I went.

Maybe other pastors don't "re-preach" their past sermons as I do (insert tongue in cheek here), but since I like using the Revised Common Lectionary to follow the Christian calendar, it really makes sermon preparation and compilation a breeze! In years past when I would revise one of my handwritten sermon outlines, I would have
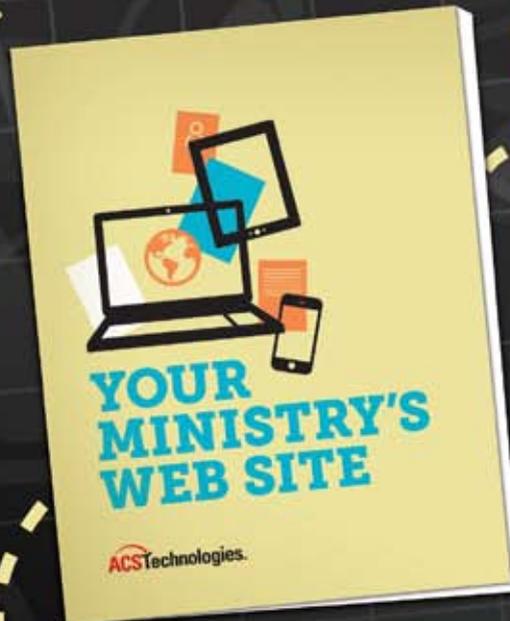
to re-write the entire outline on a new sheet of paper, but since I began using e-Sword to type up my outlines, I can now simply edit the part I wish to change and then reprint the outline. It's a real time-saver, and it looks so much neater, too!

Another helpful aspect of using e-Sword's Topic Notes editor is the ability to organize my sermon outlines by cycle and season, such as Year A – Advent/Christmastide; Year B – Eastertide; Year C – Pentecost; etc. This not only makes it easy for me to locate a sermon on a precise text for a particular occasion, but if a pastoral colleague asks if I have a sermon prepared on a particular text or topic, I can zero right in on it and either print it out or copy and paste the content into an email or a Word document, etc. Of course, if he or she uses e-Sword, it is also possible to share the Topic Notes file as an email attachment, though it does require a little computer know-how to do this. However, due to the way in which I've organized my outlines by cycle and season, the Topic Notes file will include every sermon I have for that particular cycle and season, which may be more than they want. For instance, if they desire only the sermon for the Fifth Sunday After Pentecost in Year C, they would get every sermon I've prepared for the entire Season of Pentecost in Year C. Although it might make sermon sharing easier to put each sermon in its own Topic Notes file, it makes it easier on me to organize them as I have by cycle and season all in one Topic Notes file for each season in each cycle. In the long run, it's just easier for me to copy and paste the sermon outline into a Word document or directly into an email and send it to them that way.

Not only can pastors use the Topic Notes editor for composing and storing sermon outlines (or manuscripts, as you prefer), but both pastors and Christian Education leaders alike can use

it to compose and store lesson outlines for each class they teach on any subject, although I have to admit I haven't begun doing this as yet. Over time, you can compile both sermons and lesson outlines into a thematic collection and publish them for others to benefit from.

When I say "publish," I mean that in a variety of ways, of course. Certainly, you can publish them in the most notable way by submitting them to a willing publisher (if you can find one), but there is any number of other ways to "self-publish" nowadays which savvy writers are increasingly taking advantage of. This is the digital age for publishing as much as it is for evangelism. As an independent Christian publisher, I have been using this digital method of publishing for several years now, not only for my own writing but for a handful of other Christian authors as well. In fact, I've written a short book about digital publishing entitled *Publishing Panacea*: Book Publishing in the Digital Age to help aspiring authors achieve their dream of being published on their terms. It's due out soon in eBook format first, perhaps to be followed by a print edition later

(if there is a demand for it). You can learn more about its release at my Website listed at the end of this article.

Besides print publication, however, there is also eBook and Web publishing. The easier of the two is Web publishing, where you can compose your content in a word processor of your choosing and, assuming it has built-in HTML conversion capability (as most do these days), just save your document file in the HTML (a.k.a. Web page) format, upload it to your Web host, and you're in business! If you don't already have your own Website and don't really know how or where to begin, I cover this topic pretty well in the very first chapter of my book *Digital Evangelism: You Can Do It, Too!* I've also made this chapter available as free sample content on the book's Website at www. digitalevangelism.com/ – just click on "Sample Chapter" on the site menu to read it online or download it to your computer.

If you'd like to try your hand at eBook preparation and distribution, I discuss this topic at length, too, in my new book *Publishing Panacea*. I've even developed a nifty little computer applet to aid with generating a HTML file specifically designed for eBook conversion using the textual content you provide. Is this a great country or what?

I've intended for several years now to publish some of my own sermon outlines on my personal Website, but I've just been so busy with other preoccupations that I haven't made it a priority to do so. However, as part of my work on this article, I've finally made the time and posted the Topic Notes files for all of my lectionary-based sermon outlines for Year A and for Advent/Christmastide for Year B. I'll have to get around to the rest of Years B and C later. Therefore, if you have the latest version of e-Sword installed on your computer, you can copy my Topic Notes files into your e-Sword content directory and then edit them to your own liking. I've included instructions for how to do this on my Website. Just click on the "My Sermons" link at www.parsonplace.com/pars-nofc.html#sermons.

The Topic Notes editor is only one aspect of e-Sword which is very useful for doing digital evangelism. Be sure to read next month's issue when I'll cover my experience with using the Graphics Viewer for studying Bible maps, world maps, and various charts for different lesson topics. It's very helpful!

Michael L. White is the founder and Managing Editor of Parson Place Press, an independent Christian publishing house in Mobile, Alabama. His book Digital Evangelism: You Can Do It, Too! (Parson Place Press, 2011) is available wherever books are sold. Visit his Website at books.parsonplace. com for a list of his other books and articles.