

Expanding Our Reach Through the Internet

This is a historic week in the life of our nation: We inaugurated the first African-American president. In doing so, we took a huge step forward in improving race relations and reaffirmed that the American dream is possible for all Americans.

But we need to remember that although we're rejoicing in better race relations, that is not the only issue facing our nation. Sadly, I fear that the installation of Barack Obama as president may be a step backward for the right-to-life and traditional marriage issues..

Like most of you, I watched the inauguration on TV. It was great to hear Pastor Rick Warren give one of the most beautiful invocations I've ever heard, in which he very clearly articulated the importance of following God rather than what has become called "civic religion."

And though there has sometimes been a controversy when a minister mumbles "in the name of Jesus" before saying "amen," Warren was very clear, as we reported in Charisma News Online; (which I hope you'll subscribe to, if you haven't already, by clicking [here](#)). He closed his invocation with, "In the name of the one who changed my life, Yeshua, Isa, Jesus [Spanish pronunciation], Jesus, who taught us to pray" and then ended with the Lord's Prayer.

Then Obama made a speech in which he talked about the need for change and said we must "begin again the work of remaking America." His comments resonated with many Americans, but the question is, what kind of change was he referring to? And how do we "remake" America? I believe we are engaged in a spiritual battle and that we need to pray and hold up our new

president. I believe there are signs that he's going to govern more from the middle than we initially thought he would, but only time will tell. Regardless of how far to the right or left his decisions appear to be, he's going to need God's help in a way that most of us can't even imagine, due to the enormous pressures on him and the responsibilities of his job.

Many other politicians have articulated sentiments regarding change that were similar to those Obama made—but those men were not elected president. What made the difference? I believe that Obama, unlike any prior presidential candidate, was able to capitalize on the enormous power of the Internet. He not only was able to raise money on the Internet but also was able to build a community and interact with people. He collected information from the people who went to his Web site and sent messages to them that addressed issues relevant to their particular part of the country. For example, he might have written something quite different to a person living near the Mexican border, who is concerned about illegal immigration, than he did to someone in Michigan, where the auto industry seems to be in a freefall.

The same technology Obama used to further his campaign can be used to propagate the gospel. But at this point it is in its infancy. Everyone's trying to figure out how it works—including me. We have reached the point at which we provide interactive media and communicate with people around the world through our e-newsletters. My doing this blog during the last year and soliciting your responses to it is one way for us to personally interact in a way that we haven't been able to communicate through the medium of print publications. The Internet allows us to inexpensively reach people we could never reach in any other way, to cross international lines, to interact with them and create community. Other than the family what community is stronger, or should be stronger, than the body of Christ?

In addition to making widespread communication possible, the

Internet is unsurpassed as a medium for discipling and mentoring. Interestingly, it is beginning to be used for mentoring, or coaching, by some secular people who are reaching out to the Christian community as well.

On the day Obama was inaugurated I went to a seminar in Miami about how to utilize the Internet. It was fascinating to hear how companies are beginning to connect with customers in new ways to grow their businesses. As I listened, I wondered how we in the church can take advantage of this new technology to advance the kingdom of God.

I met one of the speakers after the seminar and learned that he is an on-fire, Spirit-filled Christian. I had an opportunity to visit with him, and we talked about the fact that in the Christian community there are some who have been successful on the Internet, but no one—including us—has yet emerged as a real leader. I'll write more about this later. But the nature of a blog like this is to give regular communication, at times shorter than at others.

And I also want your input. I'd like to know what you have seen on the Internet that you really like, what needs you have in your own life and in your church, and what things you see in the body of Christ, in our nation, and worldwide that we ought to be thinking and brainstorming about.

Thanks for your input.

Steve Strang