

## Meta

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μετά. (meta): it's the Greek word that means "with" or "after." It's also the prefix for words that are meant to convey connection and change: metabolize, metamorphosis, metaphor, metastasize, metalinguistics, . . . And it's a favorite word among post-moderns, humanities scholars, those interested in virtual reality, and others trying to imagine new ways of making their way in the world—or new ways of making the world, for that matter. This edition of *@ this point*, for instance is meta: it's an example of a new kind of journal—the electronic kind, with all the advantages that entails. Its subject matter is new kids of church—many of which are shaped by the very technological transformations that make this journal possible.

Undoubtedly, that last paragraph appealed more to some readers than others: language-games, like all forms of play, appeal to some audiences more than others. Meta-questions—including those about fresh visions, fresh practices, fresh appeal, and the relation of freshness to fidelity—do that. They also drive the essays of this edition of *@ this point*. They include:

- Who finds these new experiments in church appealing? Everyone? The computer-literate? Those under 40? Those discontent with both mainline and evangelical churches? Those searching for authenticity in an increasingly virtual world?

- What makes them appealing? Their ability to build community? Their attempts to engage all our senses? Their willingness to use the latest technology? Just the fact that they don't look like church as usual?
- To what do those who are engaging in these experiments appeal in justifying their experiments? The gospel? Changes in western culture? Changes in the church?

Steve Hayner, the Peachtree Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth—and an astute observer of cultures—takes us on a tour through some of these new kinds of church in a lead essay that is by turns delightful, disorienting, and discerning. His respondents, Professors Martha Moore-Keish (theology), Rodger Nishioka (Christian education), and Marcia Riggs (ethics) ask of him and these church-experimenters the types of questions that help us see both their promises and their peril. Katie Heard-Day, a 2006 graduate of C.T.S. and sometimes-participant in these experiments, has put together a helpful set of curricula through which to learn not only more about such experiments but perhaps something about ourselves as well. Associate Editor Marissa Myers has developed a useful annotated bibliography on the theme.

We're learning to use @ *this point*'s online platform better with every edition, so it's especially appropriate to highlight a few new features that come with this edition. With a click or two of the mouse, you can now download podcast conversations about the emergent church movement that were recorded at a January Lifelong Learning event here at the seminary. The bibliography will take you to the blogs of a number of practitioners in these new forms of church. And we've shaped the "Readers Response" section with an eye toward even greater interaction on the part of readers, many of whom have grown

used to online discussions. I'm especially gratified with this last improvement. One of the underlying convictions of this journal is that theology is most interesting and fruitful when it develops in conversation. And with this issue, conversations—whether between C.T.S. faculty in the articles, between various practitioners in the podcasts, between our readers in the Readers' Response section, or within the various Sunday school and education groups that use the journal's resources—abound.

So read, enjoy, and converse! On behalf of all of us at @ *this point*, I'm delighted to welcome you to the discussions within and look forward to sharing more of them μετὰ you.

Peace,

Mark Douglas