

Technology and Religion

Lesson 1: What is technology?

1.22.2023

Objectives: Introduction to technology.

Materials: Flipchart, Post-it notes.

Time allotments: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 20 minute closing service (end class around 9:50/11:50 to begin chapel 9:55/11:55).

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ What’s your favorite piece of technology?
 - ▶ In your opinion, what technology has most shaped our lives in the 21st century?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: Guessing technology (5 minutes max)

Each person secretly writes a technological invention on a Post-it note – something that most people would likely know, please! Each person then sticks their Post-it note on another’s forehead, and everyone walks around the group trying to guess the invention on their forehead. Each person can ask ONE “Yes or No” question PER PERSON at a time. The first ones to guess take their seat, until everyone has guessed correctly.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from journalist and author, Sydney J. Harris)

“The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like [people], but that [people] will begin to think like computers.”

4. Community Time: Getting to know each other (20 minutes)

For this very first class, please take time to get to know one another. In the manner of the television show *Inside the Actors Studio*, each youth will be interviewed by a teacher and respond to as many questions as possible within 60 seconds. A second teacher will keep time. Teachers get interviewed, too! (See attached list of interview questions.)

5. Important Agreements (10 minutes)

Extend community sharing to discuss what community practices/agreements will help “learning together.” Because this class is not just about learning new information but learning about ourselves, how do we create a community where our best selves can emerge? Write these agreements on the flipchart and tape up on the wall to refer back as needed in future classes.

One important agreement for Junior High youth: youth will attend worship at least once a month with their families/friends (at either a Story Sunday or Family Sunday that occurs once each month). Unlike their younger siblings who may exit after the children’s story moment in worship, Junior High youth will stay for the whole worship. Youth should think about interesting/meaningful moments during worship and be prepared to briefly share at the following Sunday class.

***Question to consider:** The agreement to “assume positive intentions” and goodwill is vital for the work of racial justice and multiculturalism. But does that mean what others say/do out of good intentions will never hurt us?

- Are positive intentions (“I didn’t mean to... ”) protection from all harm?
- Can we apply the same principle of “assuming positive intentions” when honest, critical feedback is given? (I.e. assuming critical feedback is offered not to shame us but to request change in behavior or language; assuming best intent while honoring impact and accepting accountability as an invitation.)
- What do you think about Unity Church using the language of “brave space” as well as “safe space”? Does one help achieve the other? Which one?

6. Working Definition: “Technology as Applied Science” (5 minutes)

Invite youth to offer brief responses: What is technology?

Teacher summarizes: Human beings have **used** technology since the discovery of how to control fire and the invention of the wheel. Technology helps us to travel, fight disease, produce food, print books, control our environment, land a rover on Mars, Zoom with someone in India, and so much more.

One helpful definition of technology is to think of **technology as applied science**, as **science put to use**. **Science** helps explain how the world works; it uncovers real-world principles like gravity. **Technology** takes these principles and figures out how to apply them for our use, like rockets that overcome gravity. We may not understand all the science behind an iPhone, but we use the iPhone as a technological application to navigate our lives. So already, technology pushes us to be “users,” promoting consumption more than comprehension.

While our class will not focus on trying to understand the science behind technology, we will: (1) try to be thoughtful and wise users of technology in considering how it shapes our life, especially our life of faith. And (2) among various kinds of technology, we will focus primarily on being users of digital technology, from Amazon and Google to Facebook and YouTube to Twitter and smartphones.

7. Learning activity: Agree or Disagree (10 minutes)

Teacher Reads: “Consider a typical day: We expect our alarm to go off. We believe our lights will turn on. We expect the shower to run. We trust appliances to chill our milk, heat our coffee, toast our bread, and clean our dishes. We depend on trains and buses to move, our automobiles to start, and our GPS to guide us. Our computer will retrieve our files, print our documents, and deliver our email. Our phone can order pizza for delivery. Our thermostat makes sure we are warm in the winter and cool in the summer. We are comfortable, self-sufficient. At no time did we need to pause or even consider how these technologies worked. Conveniences once unimaginable now surround us without any significant acknowledgement from us. In many ways, they are invisible. We have faith that they will deliver, and are willing to stand in line for hours for the next and latest iPhone.

But technology has also created weapons of destructive power, from nuclear weapons to drug-resistant diseases. Technology helped create genetically modified crops in feeding the world population, but concerns are raised about its effect on health and the environment. The internet and social media has connected us like never before, and yet there is a heightened sense of alienation and feelings of disconnection. Is technology morally neutral, purely dependent on how **we** use it? Or does the nature of technology itself already shape how we use it and who we are becoming?”

- **Activity:** Youth stand in a large circle. As various statements are read aloud by a teacher, youth choose to step toward the center or not, depending on their level of agreement with the statement (center is complete agreement, outer edge is disagreement).
 - After youth move and take their stand, invite them to look around and observe the positions taken by peers.
 - Invite comments/observations.

Statements about technology:

- I use email and/or social media, almost daily, to connect with friends and family.
- The internet (websites, online streaming media, video games, etc.) serves as a regular source of information and/or entertainment for me.
- Sometimes I wonder if I spend too much time online or on social media.
- Technology may have been intended to make our life simpler, but it has actually made our life more complicated.
- Texting and emails are great ways to stay connected with my friends and family, but I also feel pulled away from friends and family in order to check updates and respond to requests.
- I use online resources, from Google search results to *Wikipedia* to Facebook posts, as reliable and authoritative sources of information I can trust.
- I believe that technology is helping to create a better future world.

8. Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

9. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets