

Faith-Based Bloggers Tackle the Election, Political Issues  
By DANIEL BURKE c. 2004 Religion News Service

PHILADELPHIA -- Equal parts soapbox, confessional and church social, the blogs of religious folk are not easily categorized. On Monday, someone may post a lengthy exegesis of a favorite Bible passage, on Tuesday a screed against Democrats and on Wednesday, a picture of his cat.

Blogs, or "Web logs," resemble personal Internet pages. But advances in computer technology are making such blogs public trading posts in the marketplace of ideas. Bloggers post comments on their pages instantaneously, provide links to articles and other Web sites, and hold running conversations between people on multiple continents.

Like incense in a mammoth cathedral, religion permeates the blogosphere.

Since this is an election year, it's only natural that many faith-based bloggers have gotten political.

Take, for example, Jason Steffens, a 26-year-old attorney in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He started his blog, [june24.net](http://june24.net), which he calls "Antioch Road," in December 2001, while a law student at the University of Iowa. As a student, Steffens said, he devoted five to 20 hours per week to his blog.

But with a newborn and a new job, his blogging time has been greatly reduced. Steffens said in an e-mail that he is one of the few "Christian bloggers who does not mind being called a `fundamentalist.'"

As such, he said his goal is to "speak truth" and "persuade others" to vote for the political candidate who most lines up with that truth.

For Steffens, that candidate is George W. Bush, who, Steffens said, "will fight the war on terror, defend the unborn and defend marriage."

Over the last several weeks, Steffens' blog has lauded a new conservative Christian political party, grumbled about a magazine's positive portrayal of Al Gore's faith, and filed a first-person report from a Bush campaign stop in Cedar Rapids.

Kathy Shaidle, a journalist and author, created her blog, [relapsedcatholic.com](http://relapsedcatholic.com), four years ago. There was a time when she could visit all of her favorite blogs over a cup of coffee, she said, but now there are so many it takes some time to remember where they are

In 2002, a number of Catholic bloggers gathered online and formed "St.

Blog Parish" -- a virtual congregation that includes priests, canon lawyers, a choir director and about 100 lay people.

In cyberspace, religious denominations tend to stick together. But the spatial realities of distance and borders do not apply. Shaidle, for instance, is Canadian. But this self-described "ugly Ann Coulter of Canada" often comments about American politics and provides links to articles that concur with her conservative views. Shaidle said that most of her readers are American.

In an e-mail exchange, Shaidle called America's presidential election "unspeakably important," and wrote that her blog will focus "on election issues, rather than, Oh look: another wacky televangelist scandal."

Because the overwhelming majority of people who have the time and equipment necessary to blog are white, middle-aged, well-educated and affluent, there is a conservative tinge to the blogosphere, said Lynn Schofield Clarke, a new-media scholar at the University of Colorado who makes the Internet a focus of his study.

Clarke said the bloggers are a small but influential group.

Terry Mattingly, a veteran religion reporter and professor who studies the intersection of the media and religion, contributes to the blog "getreligion.org." He said that more conservatives are led to blogging because they "feel more cut off from the mainstream media."

There are, however, a number of religious liberals who blog.

"The Village Gate," formerly called "The Right Christians," is an online community of religious progressives that "serves as an electronic gathering place for those who seek to re-energize the progressive tradition," according to a posting on the Web site by the Rev. Alan Brill, a Lutheran pastor in South Carolina. It can be found at [therightchristians.org](http://therightchristians.org).

And Chuck Currie, who is training to be a United Church of Christ minister at the Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves, Mo., said that blogging is an important part of his ministry to the homeless and disenfranchised.

Currie contributes several hours a day to his blog, [chuckcurrie.blogs.com](http://chuckcurrie.blogs.com), which has been live for about a year. Recent posts include an interview with the Rev. Bob Edgar of the National Council of Churches, prayers for peace and reports that Sen. Lincoln Chafee, R-R.I., might not vote for Bush.

Though his wife thinks his devotion to blogging is "semi-insane," Currie said that he will continue to blog, if only "to show that there is a difference" between liberal and conservative Christians.

Sometimes it feels a bit futile, like "a crazy person standing on the street corner and shouting," Currie said. "But then, maybe a few people will stop to listen for a while."