

The price of print: Economic reality

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [August 11, 2009](#) issue

The only downside to spending time on a barrier island in North Carolina in the summer is that it's hard to find a good newspaper. You can locate the *New York Times* if you look for it, but it's not easy. My son-in-law peruses the *Times* on the Internet, and, bless him, he will print out as much of it for me as I want. And right there is one of the challenges for newspapers and magazines: young adults are doing most of their periodical reading online.

That is one reason why every week, it seems, we read about another publication downsizing, shifting resources to the Internet or discontinuing publication. The *Rocky Mountain News* is gone. So is the print edition of the *Seattle-Post Intelligencer*. Other major dailies, like the *Chicago Tribune*, have drastically cut staff, decreased their number of pages, and tried to revise their look for a new generation.

Magazines, too, have been hit hard: *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Sports Illustrated* and *People* have made major cuts. Virtually everyone in the industry is dealing with changes in readers' habits, the decline in advertising revenue, and now a sour economy. Some commentators wonder whether print journalism will survive.

Some of my younger friends tease me a bit about my commitment, or addiction, to print on paper—to newspapers, magazines and books that I can hold in my hand. I acknowledge that a new world of electronic journalism is arriving. The problem is that no one in the industry has yet figured out the business model for online journalism. For almost all journals, print subscriptions and advertising are still what pays the bills.

The *Christian Century* is a not-for-profit business. It has a remarkably loyal family of readers. Even in the economic downturn, the magazine's renewal rates have held quite steady. Yet the *Century* too has to deal with the dynamics of the market—especially declining advertising revenue and rising costs—and has made the decision to raise the price of a one-year subscription to \$59. This is the first price increase we have made in eight years. Over that time we have taken significant steps to rein in the cost of production and administration. We recommit ourselves to

that effort of stewardship.

We also recommit ourselves to our fundamental mission: providing timely reports on religious life and challenging reflections on what it means—for individuals, congregations and church leaders—to proclaim and embody the Christian faith in these days. We are grateful for your shared commitment to this venture of thinking critically and living faithfully.