

A globe-crossing consecration

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

February 3, 2011

I've [said before](#) that [celebrating communion via Twitter](#) (to make "a statement that we're prepared to embrace the technological revolution") seems like an especially poor use of technology. But Lisa Nichols Hickman [brings up](#) a techno-sacramental innovation

that's at least somewhat more compelling: using Skype to commune with Christians across the globe, especially in isolated and conflict-torn places.

The [Conflict Kitchen](#) is a public art project and restaurant in Pittsburgh that serves only food from countries with which the U.S. is in conflict. After visiting the restaurant, Nichols Hickman writes this:

One of the events [the Conflict Kitchen] highlight[s] is a [live Skype meal](#) between a group of strangers seated at tables in Pittsburgh and in Tehran. Sharing the same meal and conversation across seven time zones, strangers became acquainted with each other over broken bread. Even more importantly, they shared the same hope for peace.

And so I wondered, and ask the same of you, would it be blasphemous to Skype communion with Christians in a country across the globe? Could Christians in Raleigh and Rwanda find encouragement from each other at the table?

Blasphemers might argue that Skyping communion is spectacle over Sacrament: webcams, language barriers and other details are impediments to the Word heard and act engaged. Technology aside, perhaps the real argument is the nature of communion within community. Far from being exotic, maybe it is putting up with the mundane within a known community that makes real communion. What would be sacrificed via Skype is real relationship. Technology makes the sacrament sterile and simple to the

point that communion becomes sentimental rather than an act of reconciliation.

But those who argue breakthrough might say that the Skyped communion is a first step beyond stereotypes and the capacity of nations to create 'others'. Sitting down at the table, even through a webcam, creates the possibility for new community where bread is broken across national lines, language barriers, time zones and war decrees. The other, joined with bread, becomes brother.

I'm not convinced; I can't get past the considerable gap between "gathered community" and "electronically connected people." But this does strike me as far more serious an idea than the Twitchrist example. The goal is nobler (global bridge-building vs. showing off the church's tech savvy). As for the medium, it's real-time verbal and visual communication--even face to face in *some* real sense--and so is vulnerable and present in a way following a Twitter feed is not.

In any case, using Skype to break bread with/"with" other Christians across national conflict lines has powerful possibilities--even if you have a celebrant at each end, or simply have a meal instead of communion.

What do you think?