

Ministry in the Metaverse: A Fad or a New Frontier to Preach the Gospel?

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Even as COVID restrictions relax, many houses of worship have found it difficult to attract returning parishioners at their pre-pandemic attendance levels. The resulting physical and financial drop-off further complicates the worrying trend of church closures outpacing new ones to replace them.

But the shift also stirred a religious awakening of sorts, forcing once reluctant pastors and church leaders to rethink their outreach and adopt widely-used technology, like livestreaming which has allowed them to reach audiences far beyond their church walls.

Now some faith leaders are considering what's next on the technology horizon and the implications for ministry, eyeing the uncharted world of the metaverse to plant churches and preach the gospel.

Metaverse: A Primer

Not to be confused with Marvel Comic's multiverse, the metaverse is a 3D digital world that allows users to experience an alternate reality using computer software and specialized VR equipment, like goggles and haptic suits that use sound vibrations to mimic physical sensations that can simulate touch.

To the casual observer, it's easy to dismiss the computer-generated depictions as cartoons or video games, but in reality, they represent real people guiding their avatar selves in a much more immersive world than what most people are accustomed to experiencing on their phones, tablets or

computers.

That realm is gaining interest among the curious and the faithful, including ministries like based in Edmond, Oklahoma. Its Church Online Platform helped 30,000 churches continue to spread the gospel even as their physical doors shuttered in the wake of the global shutdown in March 2020.

While many churches are still struggling with attendance, has witnessed growth—even adding a campus in the metaverse last December, a reboot of a previous venture on another multimedia platform called Second Life. Much like traditional missions, its decision was based on a desire to be a “light” in a space that lacks a Christian influence.

“We found that the environment was a rich environment for ministry,” said Bobby Gruenewald, pastor of innovation at . “When there’s new technologies and new platforms and all the new attention that the metaverse is getting today, we want to be present and we want to learn and understand how we can do ministry in it.”

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