

## **EXPOSING YOUR CHURCH WITHOUT IMPLODING YOUR CHURCH**

We learned in the previous session about the basic mechanics of launching your Metaverse Church. But I don't want you to get so lost in these details that you lose sight of something just as important: Exposing your Church to Metaverse Ministry without Imploding Your Church.

The newness of the Metaverse...and perhaps a bit of the weirdness of the Metaverse...makes some Christians instantly nervous about doing ministry there. It is not instantly obvious to them that the Metaverse is a wide-open, missional harvest field. They need to be led towards this understanding. But there are some key things you can do to lead your flock so that they celebrate your Metaverse Ministry instead of condemning it.

I think the easiest way for me to help you is to give you a play-by-play gameplan of how I led my in real life church at Cornerstone into the Metaverse. Perhaps some of these steps will help you in your church context.

Here is how I began my journey of exposing my church to the Metaverse:

### ***GAMEPLAN***

#### ***Making Initial Preparations***

**PRAYER:** It may be obvious, but sometimes we can overlook the need to pray for God's help and protection over our flock. Praying for unity and communicative clarity are essential.

**BUY HEADSET:** As I mentioned in the previous session, you may want to wait until later to spend any money. For me, I decided I needed to go all in if I really wanted to effectively investigate the legitimacy of doing ministry in the Metaverse. So, I bought an Oculus Quest headset.

**VISIT VR CHURCHES:** I visited DJ Soto's Virtual Reality Church and learned how he was doing ministry in the Metaverse. This was very helpful to increase my confidence that this could be done.

**DROP SEEDS:** I began to have informal conversations with more missionally-minded members of my church about what I had observed in the Metaverse.

**FIELD TRIPS:** I then began to have some of these church members try on my headset so *they* could go into DJ's church and other places in the Metaverse.

**EVANGELIZE:** I then began to interact with the people of the Metaverse in different hangout worlds. I sought to understand more of their culture: what kinds of questions they were asking and the struggles they were experiencing. I was more convinced that this was the place God wanted our church to do the Great Commission.

**RECRUITING:** I began to recruit a few like-minded volunteers who were already interested in tech and gaming. One man already had a VR headset. A couple teens joined the team

because they loved gaming. A team of 4 was formed and they helped me begin to experiment in setting up a space for a church service and learning how to moderate it.

### ***Communicating with the Church***

VISIONCASTING: As we made more and more progress, it was time to communicate my sense of God's call to the entire church. It was Christmas 2019, so I decided to incorporate this Metaverse Mission into my Christmas Eve message. I brought up my headset and talked about the Reality of Light coming into the Reality of our Darkness at Christmas. I shared about how I had personally witnessed the many who are hurting and in darkness in the new Digital spaces of our technological world. And I encouraged them that we can go TO them and bring them light just as Christ did for us when He came to Earth.

REPORTING: I then began to share more about what the team I had recruited was doing to reach these lost souls in the Metaverse. I would send emails and give brief reports on Sunday mornings from time to time. I would often try to emphasize my Hybrid philosophy of ministry so that anyone skeptical of digital ministry would see that I still value physical ministry and do not see digital as a replacement for it. A physical church will naturally have this concern and articulating a Hybrid philosophy is helpful to address it.

LAUNCH: The team and I finally did a worship service soft launch in AltspaceVR in March of 2020. We had already planned to launch then, but in God's sovereignty the COVID pandemic began at the same time. We did not over-highlight this launch to the congregation. We just began to faithfully show up each Sunday at the VR Church campus. We only had a few people come the first week or two, but it gradually began to grow.

GATHER STORIES: As God provided stories of planting Gospel seeds and people getting saved, we began to highlight these stories with the congregation. We would begin to talk about what was happening in the Metaverse more and more. But we still did not overemphasize the fact we were starting a church campus. We simply focused on the evangelistic work being done.

SHOW SERVICES: Finally, when we had our first baptism service in AltspaceVR we livestreamed it to our physical church during an afternoon potluck and church business meeting. Our Altspace service is at 1pm every Sunday, so this worked nicely. Showing them this baptism service was a risk. But hearing the testimonies of these changed lives moved them all greatly. The entire physical congregation erupted in applause after they saw the baptisms!

RESPOND TO QUESTIONS: Of course, I knew that questions would begin to come. I took the time to address concerns about baptism and church in the Metaverse. Our church holds to a Memorialist view of the Sacraments, so we realize that it is not so much about the water but about the symbolism of the water. One older member couldn't get past the cartoonish avatars. He still struggles with this. But I continue to talk with him and he is at a point where he at least can see the need to reach these lost souls.

### ***Making Metaverse Ministry Normative***

**INVOLVE MORE LEADERS:** I began to get more key leaders and elders involved in the Metaverse Church. My preaching team would rotate in and preach in the Altspace church on the weekend they were preaching in the physical church. I bought a couple more headsets so I could take several leaders at once into the VR Church so they could spend time fellowshiping with the congregants. I would also take them into other worlds to witness to the people we met.

**HYBRID OPPORTUNITIES:** I began to make sure that whenever I did group trainings and seminars for the physical church I would include the Metaverse churches. I used Discord, two-way cameras, mics and a large screen TV so that everyone could engage together. This knit the hearts of many of the members together across the campuses.

**SETUP GIVING OPPORTUNITIES:** I set up our Patreon giving app and an app for Cryptocurrency donations in our Metaverse churches. As giving began to come in from them, I was able to report the generosity of these brothers and sisters to the physical congregation and leaders. This engendered greater respect for the Metaverse church family.

**HIRING METAVERSE STAFF:** As the elders became more encouraged by the stories of growth and life change in the Metaverse, they were more willing to put more of our budget behind it. We hired a Metaverse Pastor in the middle of 2021. He lives across the country, but we have flown him in to spend time with the physical congregation and missions committee and have had him preach on Sunday both in person and via video with a camera set up so he can see the congregation as he preaches. As the congregation has become more endeared to him, they have grown even more supportive of the Metaverse ministry he now leads.

**HOST VR FAMILY REUNION:** Last fall we hosted a VR Family Reunion where we invited the members of the Metaverse campuses to fly out to California to spend the weekend with the physical campus. We had many of them come. They stayed in the homes of members and we had several get-togethers with the whole church. This too has increased the excitement and love the physical church feels about their Metaverse brothers and sisters!

**REGULAR LIVESTREAMING AND POSTING:** We now continually post about what is happening in ALL our campuses, both physical and digital. And we post the livestream of our Metaverse churches on our main social media pages alongside the physical services. This continues to make Metaverse Church ministry normative for our congregation.

**FULL CIRCLE:** This past Christmas Eve 2021, we shared a video of the Metaverse Churches reading the story of the Birth of Christ and wishing the physical congregation a Merry Christmas. It was two years to the date from when I first spoke about VR to my congregation. It is very encouraging to see how connected all the campuses are now!

### ***KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER***

Here are some things from the steps of my gameplan I think it is important to highlight:

1. **Research:** Make sure you have some solid understanding of the Metaverse so your people feel more confident about your call there.
2. **Stories:** It is critical to have stories of the real people of the Metaverse. They need to hear that it is NOT just a game. It is not a place where people are fake. They need to hear how vulnerable the people are and how much they are hurting and in need of Jesus.
3. **Talk:** Keep talking about the Metaverse. Talk to key, influential people who will champion this ministry with you.
4. **Cast Vision:** Help the people really understand how the Great Commission can be obeyed in the Metaverse.
5. **Be Patient:** Understand that it will take time for some of your people to be fully comfortable with Metaverse Ministry. Answer their questions and give them grace.

I hope this has helped you think through the best way to lead your people into Metaverse Ministry without causing an explosion in the church. As you lead them into Mission Mode and away from church Maintenance Mode, God will do great work through your people in the Metaverse. The joy of hearing about new and growing Christians will inspire your people and lead them to embrace this unique ministry with excitement instead of concern.

Thank you for taking this course. I hope it has given you more confidence to engage in Metaverse Ministry. Again, you are always welcome to come visit one of our churches to do some exploring. I would love to meet you! Please go to [cornerstoneyc.com/vr](https://cornerstoneyc.com/vr) to see how to connect to us! Let's reach ALL worlds for Jesus! Together!