

Welcome to this introductory training on the Meta Church. I am Jason Poling, lead pastor of Cornerstone Church in Yuba City, CA, which includes several campuses in the Metaverse. I am excited for you. I know this is a totally new frontier for doing the mission of Christ. I'm sure you have lots of questions, and maybe even some concerns. I hope to address some of those in this course. But mostly, the fact that you signed up for this shows you have lots of hopes for how you and your church can be used by Christ to seek and to save that which is lost! I want to encourage you in this course to see that the harvest is plentiful and if you will go, you will reap a full harvest for Jesus!

I am breaking this course into 4 parts. We will first look at "*META as Mission*". I want to show you why now is the time for the church to enter the Metaverse. Secondly, I want to help you think through a sound "*Philosophy of Metaverse Ministry*" so that you will have a good foundation set before you encounter the opportunities and challenges of the Metaverse. Thirdly, I will walk you through some of the "*Mechanics of Metaverse Ministry*", the nuts and bolts of what you will need to make ministry happen in the Metaverse. Finally, I want to talk about "*Exposing Your Church without Imploding Your Church*" as you lead them towards Metaverse Ministry.

Let's now dive into session 1: **META AS MISSION**

Current Missiological Climate in the West

I know most of you are well aware of the current missiological landscape in the West. Whether you've researched it, or just anecdotally experienced it, all is not quiet on the Western Front. Even though many of you know these things, it does help to be reminded once more in order to set the stage for why the Metaverse is so important to global missions, but especially in the West.

For example, in the United States, researchers have noticed a severe decline in Church attendance, especially in the last 10 years. Although there are stories of some churches increasing in attendance, it appears that this is primarily the result of church migration and the re-churching of formerly churched individuals. While there are some signs of truly unchurched people coming to Christ, this is not the main engine of church growth currently in the West.

By most studies, we are coming to realize that the majority of people in the United States and throughout the Western World, especially in the emerging generations, are unchurched and have virtually no interest in coming to one. In 2016, Barna conducted a study that found 57% of Gen Z is unchurched or non-Christian. And that, of the 43% that identified as "Christian", only 9% self-identified as an "Engaged Christian". And this data was from over 5 years ago. The situation has not gotten better in that time.

We know the Gates of Hell will not prevail against the Church. But that doesn't mean there aren't sectors of the Church that are in danger of losing their lampstands, just as some in Asia Minor did, as we see from the Book of Revelation. I think we are beginning to flirt with that potential outcome in the West. But we should hear the challenge, like the one given to the Church at Sardis, "*You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the*

sight of my God.” (Revelation 3:1-2) We don’t need to be defeated by rebukes of our Lord, but rather, be compelled to obey His Great Commission with renewed vigor.

The harvest truly is plentiful, it just appears to be more ripe in the Metaverse at the moment. But the laborers are few.

Let me tell you a little bit about the Metaverse Harvest Field...

The Metaverse Harvest Field

Where churches are seeing a marked decrease in interest by the majority of the population, the Metaverse is seeing the reverse. The Metaverse does not just include Virtual Reality, but also games, chat rooms, streaming platforms, and other digital environments. Over the past few years, the Metaverse has grown to the tune of billions of active users. And in that space, there is very little Church influence. The Gospel is hardly known among the Metaverse denizens.

I want to encourage you to see the Metaverse as an entirely new world full of lost souls. These people align themselves into different digital platforms as if they are tribes on these continents. And most of these tribes are completely unchurched and have no intention of visiting a physical church no matter how much you and I try to welcome them there.

These new tribes are largely composed of the emerging generations: Millennials, Zers and Generation Alpha. They have been severely affected by a nihilistic worldview and so they are often very depressed. They come into the Metaverse in search of meaningful relationships because they often feel alone and hopeless in the physical world. This is largely due to the fact our physical world has lost the art of hospitality and relationship-building and has replaced these with a performance-ethic: an evolutionary and nihilistic worldview that enshrines individual success as the only way to survive.

And so the Metaverse is largely then, an escape from this cold reality in order to find the comforts of community. People in the Metaverse come there to converse, unload their burdens, and find encouragement to carry on. But there is a fatal flaw: it does not have the Gospel. And so as more escape reality into the Metaverse to find community, they will not find a community that renews the mind and sets them free to bravely face their trials in the real world.

This must be where the Church steps in. We must go to them. We must enter their tribes and show them the riches of the Gospel. A Gospel that frees them from the pressure to perform. A Gospel that shows them the blessing of true community centered on the triune God and infused with grace and love because of the work of Christ.

The Goal of our mission in the Metaverse must be to show them the beauty of the Church...the community they have avoided in the real world because of ignorance, misinformation, or hurt. Once they see this true community, we believe that as they are disciples, they will desire to connect to a church body in the physical world.

But let me tell you a few stories so you can connect this analytical information to real people:

Stories from the Metaverse

Alice is a UK woman in her early twenties. She came to Cornerstone VR Church almost 2 years ago now. She came as a self-identified “Satanist” to “troll” our community. A troll is one who basically wants to stir up trouble and distract a community’s events. But quickly she found

a community that wanted to befriend her, even though she was not a Christian. She felt loved and over the course of a year took more steps toward Jesus. A few months ago, Alice prayed to receive Christ as her Savior and Lord, praying one of the most beautiful “sinner’s prayers” I have ever heard. She is being discipled, has begun to serve, and even built our newest church campus in a new platform, “continent” amongst a new tribe of lost souls.

Tyler is a man in his twenties from New Jersey. He was unchurched but had a connection with a young man named Stewart, who had recently received Christ at Cornerstone. The two of them had played a video game called Call of Duty online for many years. Stewart invited Tyler to Cornerstone VR Church and Tyler prayed to receive Christ. He had recently lost his mother and was struggling with addictions to cope. Now he is being discipled and actively serves to welcome and encourage others in our VRChat campus.

Lasse is a young man in his twenties from Denmark. He too was unchurched and living in a very Post-Christian and nihilistic culture. He stumbled upon Cornerstone VR Church while playing in the Metaverse and prayed to receive Christ. He has struggled with depression but has found encouragement from the Body of Christ.

Rob is a man in his thirties from the UK with autism. He often finds it hard to connect in the physical church because of all the social cues he must constantly consider. In VR, he finds it is easier for his mind to slow down so he can actually engage in real and meaningful fellowship.

Jan is a man in his twenties from Estonia. He came to Cornerstone VR almost two years ago, unchurched and struggling with what to believe. Many of his neighbors are Muslim and were trying to convert him. He prayed to receive Christ and has been discipled.

There are too many stories to tell. All I can say is this: throughout my 15 years of pastoral ministry I have taken seriously Paul’s call to pastors to “do the work of an evangelist”, but I can testify that I have had the opportunity to share my faith with more lost souls in the last two years doing Metaverse Ministry, than in my entire ministry in the physical Church. We could analyze the reasons for this in multiple ways, but one thing is for sure: *the harvest is plentiful in the Metaverse.*

Let me conclude this session by showing you the benefits of ministry in the metaverse.

Why You and Your Church Should Minister in the Metaverse

Like all technology...and all reality...the Metaverse will morph and change as time goes on. But one thing is for certain: the digital world is here and won’t stop changing human society. Our calling is simply to live in the present. We are called to Go and Go NOW, wherever there are lost souls.

Here are the benefits of going for you and your church:

- 1. *Getting your church on Mission and away from Maintenance.*** We must continue to do church as we are. It is not so broken that we must discard it. Let’s keep ministering to the saints in physical spaces. This is as God intended. Let’s keep giving to global missions. But Christians have often been lulled into apathy by merely coming to Church and giving to Church so that OTHERS will do the work of ministry. The Metaverse allows some in your church to engage in real missions work themselves, instead of merely paying others to do so. This will excite your people and grow their faith.

2. ***Multiplication will happen.*** It is almost free to start new churches in the Metaverse. Money is not the limiter...missional will is. Like in Acts, churches began to spring up naturally in fertile soil as Paul and others delivered the Good News. We are seeing this happen in the Metaverse. You will see multiplication happen more quickly there.
3. ***Discipleship is expected.*** Sometimes in the physical church, busyness and consumerism has so set in that many people are not always interested in taking time to be discipled. In the Metaverse, the people the new followers of Christ come from a different cultural framework. They WANT to be engaged and learn how to have a deeper relationship with Christ and with you. I am also amazed at how willing they are to give of their time, talent, and treasure. We have seen great generosity emerge from our Metaverse churches.
4. ***Reaching the Truly Unchurched.*** There is something life-giving about not building on a foundation someone else has laid. There is a joy in seeing churches planted where there were none before. You will experience this in the Metaverse.

I hope I have encouraged you to at least explore Metaverse Ministry a little bit more. You are always welcome to come visit one of our churches to see what it is like. Please go to cornerstonec.com/vr to see how to do so.

In our next session, I will help you begin to craft a philosophy of ministry that works in the new world of the Metaverse.