Much has changed but much has stayed the same. Communication is still difficult. Relationships still take work. And followers of Jesus still have a mission to share God's love, mercy, and grace wherever they go—even online.

https://discoveryseries.org/courses/being-jesus-online/lessons/being-jesus-online-introduction/

Broadly speaking, a church in the metaverse is a fully online church set in a virtual world. Every user is represented by an avatar inside this immersive universe; a virtual reality platform where one can socialise, work and play.

https://ourdailybread.org/spotlight-malaysia/church-in-the-metaverse-are-you-ready/

We are always online, that is, thinking and behaving in a way that reveals the constant connectivity available to us.

We are called to be communicators of the Gospel regardless of the technologies available to us, and this call precedes digital or other revolutions in social communication.

The Church of the future, sharing the Good News in digital culture, has the opportunity to offer a witness to the truth, as inspired by the Spirit, and to recall not only its content but worth and value for living well as a society.

One of the challenges experienced in digital culture is the breaking of social bonds, isolation and estrangement that can emerge. In a cultural context built around connectivity, this challenge is a surprising one. We have all the technological means available to us to establish connections amongst ourselves, and these connections should carry the potential to deepen into or to strengthen already existing relationships. Communication in and through the digital networks has the potential to be oriented toward a sense of communion, both in a temporal sense but also heralding eternal communion with God.

At the same time, connections do not automatically become anything more profound than just connections, and these connections can be experienced in a way that is the opposite of communion depersonalized responses or reactions to words on a screen, ad hominem attacks that do not take into consideration the dignity of the other, verbal harassment, threats, cyberbullying. Part of the relative anonymity of the screen allows for the emergence of these kinds of heightened responses, which are less likely to manifest as quickly and as strongly if two persons were meeting face to face rather than mediated by a screen. In any given comment feed we can see this occurring a thread of comments quickly escalating from a difference of opinions to name-calling, sarcasm, harsh words, strong emotions. One wonders about the outcome of such battles, which result less in a true exchange of different perspectives and the possibility or learning something new, and more so in anger, embarrassment, tribalism and the reinforcement of previously held ideas.

https://concilium-vatican2.org/en/original/zsupanjerome/

In chapter 1, Justin Clemens and Adam Nash argue that digital technology challenges traditional ontological taxonomies with dilemmas and irresolvable aporias that must form the basis of a "paraconsistent" logic of digital ontology—that is, the real and yet virtual nature of the digital challenges traditional material/immaterial, real/unreal ontological dichotomies.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rsr.14102

We shouldn't think of these technologies as replacing each other. We should think of them as layering to form an effective pattern of communication. Television, Web conferencing, and e-mail should not replace face-to-face communication but rather complement it. (32)

We need to think about the communications challenge similar to a cross-cultural challenge. A missionary would not go to the Philippines without trying to understand the language and culture of the people there. So is it important for both church leaders and missionaries to understand the culture of the digital generation. (32)

https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=6&sid=c78e92d2-1f7a-490b-b916-6091714b1cd1%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=ATLA0001786777&db=lsdar

- Face to face Gospel and the Death of Distance by Tim Stafford

The combination of social distancing measures due to COVID-19 and high-speed Internet technology has ushered the possibility for a contact-free society in not only business and economy but also social, cultural and religious life. (298)

Soto claims that the VR church is more effective in making Christian faith real and experienceable by creating virtual environments such as "Christmas World" where the participants can visit Bethlehem and walk through the village and experience the area virtually firsthand (Round, 2019). (299)

Douglas Estes (2009: 33), the author of the famous book SimChurch, raised a significant question: "Is it legitimate to regard VR Church as an authentic expression of the church of Jesus Christ?" He defines VR Church as "a community called by God to expand His kingdom and a regular meeting of believers confessing Jesus as Lord in VR" (Estes, 2009: 37). He asserts that VR church is not a figment in imagination or fiction but true people of God meeting in VR as local churches meet in the physical reality (Estes, 2009: 37). In other words, VR church's ecclesial nature as a community of the people of God made alive by the Spirit of God interacting with them (Estes, 2009: 108). Like other traditional churches, VR church can also be authentic and valid as it has the nature of universality by confessing the same beliefs yet has adaptability and flexibility to be relevant to and missional in the contemporary culture. What makes the church authentic is not its geographical location or architecture, but the presence of God as His people worship Him in Truth and Spirit (John 4:21- 23). Since COVID-19 broke out and the UK government imposed various restrictions on the religious sector, local churches have not been able to meet physically at their worship premises but meet through various Internet platforms. Recently, Rev. Nicky Gumbel of Holy Trinity Brompton, the founder of the Alpha Course, explains, "the Holy Spirit can work through Zoom" (The Economist,

4 June 2020). The presence of God and His works are not limited and restricted by locations, space or time, even in VR (Blythe and Wolpert, 2004). God presents Himself through His Spirit not only in the physical sacred buildings but also in the virtual world (Parry, 2014: 144). This is in much the same vein as what John Calvin said about the Church in Institutes of the Christian Religion: "This Kingdom (the church) is neither bounded by location in space nor circumscribed by any limits" (McNeill, 1960: 1381). (301)

Regardless of denominationalism and preferrable liturgical theology, one thing in common is that the sacraments have been conducted while both the conductor and participants are physically present. (301)

If VR church maintains the essence of the church while it takes a brand new form to be continually expressed as an authentic part of God's community based on the concept of Hans Küng's ecclesiology, it is clear that it needs to take the first possibility. It is absolutely necessary that VR churches need to collaborate with the traditional churches to develop their theological foundations as well as to overcome ministerial limitations and challenges (Kim, 172–173). Furthermore, it is urgently requested that the traditional churches need to plan more sound VR churches as there are already spurious churches in VR. (303)

Virtual Reality Church as a New Mission Frontier in the Metaverse: Exploring Theological Controversies and Missional Potential of Virtual Reality Church by Guichun Jun in Sage Journals

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346024152_Virtual_Reality_Church_as_a_New_Mission_Frontier_in_the_Metaverse_Exploring_Theological_Controversies_and_Missional_Potential_of_Virtual_Reality_Church

For a brief synopsis, the word mission implies a task in which God sends a person whom he has called to introduce another group of people to salvation in Christ. The word missionary describes the person who is sent. The mission of the church is to deploy missionaries into all parts of the world until everyone has the opportunity to hear and respond to the message of Jesus.

David J. Wilson, and Lorane Wilson. Pipeline : Engaging the Church in Missionary Mobilization. William Carey Press, 2018.

Kim's first article:

https://typeset.io/journals/korea-presbyterian-journal-of-theology-2056nrg7/2013

Active Church in the Metaverse:

https://www.vrchurch.org/

https://www.thechurch.digital/jeff-reed

Thus, congregations need to rethink their ecclesiology to consider how they might embrace a more liquid and democratic version of church life that focuses on nurturing webs of relationships rather than preserving church buildings and institutional authority.

Yust in Shorter Reviews in Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology

A healthy digital church utilizes content to drive people to community where there is an emphasis on disciple-making that intentionally helps people discover their missional calling in digital, virtual, and even physical spaces. 39-40

There's a simple principle here: online to offline. The gospel that we hear in our online world must influence our offline relationships. Otherwise, the church creates consumers rather than disciples. We want to see people showing the fruits of the Spirit digitally and physically. As a result of online to offline, some digital churches are growing into a digital/micro-church strategy. This looks like multiple digital small groups that interconnect in one digital church community. The digital church itself, then, is not a place to gather. Instead, it serves as a digital distribution network for the gospel. Essentially, the Internet is used like the modern network of Roman roads, and digital church planters are the new Paul. (40).

Meeting God in the Metaverse Jeff Reed

For me, the service didn't feel like church, so much as a performance of church. Despite best efforts to mimic reality, belly laughter and blushing don't easily reduce to digital code. (40)

Can we find belonging by relying on a platform that promises escape? (45)

Olivia Bardo, Is Church in the Metaverse?

Rather, the nature of online presence itself powerfully reinforces the sense that we are not our bodies, that we have total control over our identity and our story, and that any threat to this feeling can and ought to be "deleted" so that we don't have to put up with it.

- Digital Liturgies, Samuel James (30-31)

We have become exceedingly good at replacing human beings with technology… To actively resist the dehumanization of much digital technology, we have to do something simple yet often difficult: we have to gather… The church is not simply an exhibition of spiritual events for public spectacle, but a living institution where the Holy Spirit meets with his people.

Pages 175 to 177 in Digital Liturgies