How a Better Understanding of the Church Will Develop Members Missiologically in a Digital Age

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Who am I?

- MDiv Student in Missiology

- Desire to Go Overseas to Participate in the Missionary Task

- Work in the Center for Great Commission Studies and have recently been looking at how churches develop a sending culture.

Three Questions

❑ What makes a church a church?

❑ How does our definition of church provide us with a framework for missions?

❑ How does our framework help us answer thorny missiological questions in a digital society?

Problem - "Lack of Going"

Church members have a deficient understanding of church (ecclesiology). This inhibits churches and church members from moving outward in evangelism, discipleship, and sending (missiology).

So, how might we fix this?

We must teach our members to have a more robust understanding of the church (ecclesiology) that includes the fact that churches are ontologically sent by God to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

What might this result in?

This could propel members forward in evangelism, discipleship, and sending (missiology).

This might help us better answer thorny missiological questions that are presented by some of the new frontiers in a digital society.

3.4 Billion

42.4%

- *Joshua Project*

"People Groups of the World | Joshua Project." 2024. Accessed March 5, 2024. https://joshuaproject.net/.

What Makes a Church a Church?

- The people?

- The building?

- The size?

- Is a church defined by its goals, characteristics, or functions?

"A church is a building, the officialdom of a religious body, a body or organization or believers, or a public divine worship space."

- *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

Theological Perspectives on Church

Acts 2	Payne's House Church	Dever's Nine Marks
Hammett's Seven Characteristics	Allison's Seven Attributes	Baptistic Church

Acts 2

Christocentric	Conversion	Apostolic Teaching
Fellowship	Prayer	Spirit-Empowered
Ordinances	Worship	Reproduction

Payne's House Church

Organic   Simple   Participatory   Community-driven   Celebrate equality in ministerial roles

J. D. Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel* (Colorado Springs; Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2008), 38–42.

Dever's Nine Marks

Preaching	Biblical Theology	The Gospel
Conversion	Evangelism	Membership
Discipline	Discipleship	Leadership

Dever, Mark, and H. B. Charles. 2021. Nine Marks of a Healthy Church. 4th edition. Crossway.

Hammett's Seven Characteristics

God's	Organized	Purposeful	Local	Living

Gospel-Centered	Spirit-Empowered

Hammett, John S. 2019. Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology. Updated & Expanded edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic.

Allison's Seven Attributes

Doxological

Logocentric

Pneuma-dynamic

Covenantal

Confessional

Missional

Spatio-Temporal/Eschatological

Allison, Gregg R. 2012. Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church. Edited by John S. Feinberg.

1st edition. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

Baptist Church

"An autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord."

SBC. 2000. "Baptist Faith & Message 2000 - The Baptist Faith and Message." Https://Bfm.Sbc.Net/.

Accessed April 4, 2023. https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/.

Framework

Doxological

Gospel-Centered

Spirit-Empowered

Local

Sent

Doxological

Doxological

His/God's

Lordship of Christ

Centered on the Father

Worship/Awe produced

Gospel-Centered

Biblical Theology/The Gospel

Logocentric/Confessional

Christocentric

Conversion

Spirit-Empowered

Spirit-Empowered

Pneuma-dynamic

Holy Spirit directing the Work (Acts 2)

Local

Spatio-Temporal/Covenantal

Community-Driven/Participatory

Local (Twice)

Membership/Discipline

Fellowship

Sent

Missional

Purposeful

Evangelism/Discipleship

Extend the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth

Reproducing
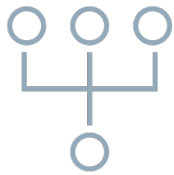
Framework

Doxological

Gospel-Centered

Spirit-Empowered

Local

Sent

Contemporary Missiological Implications
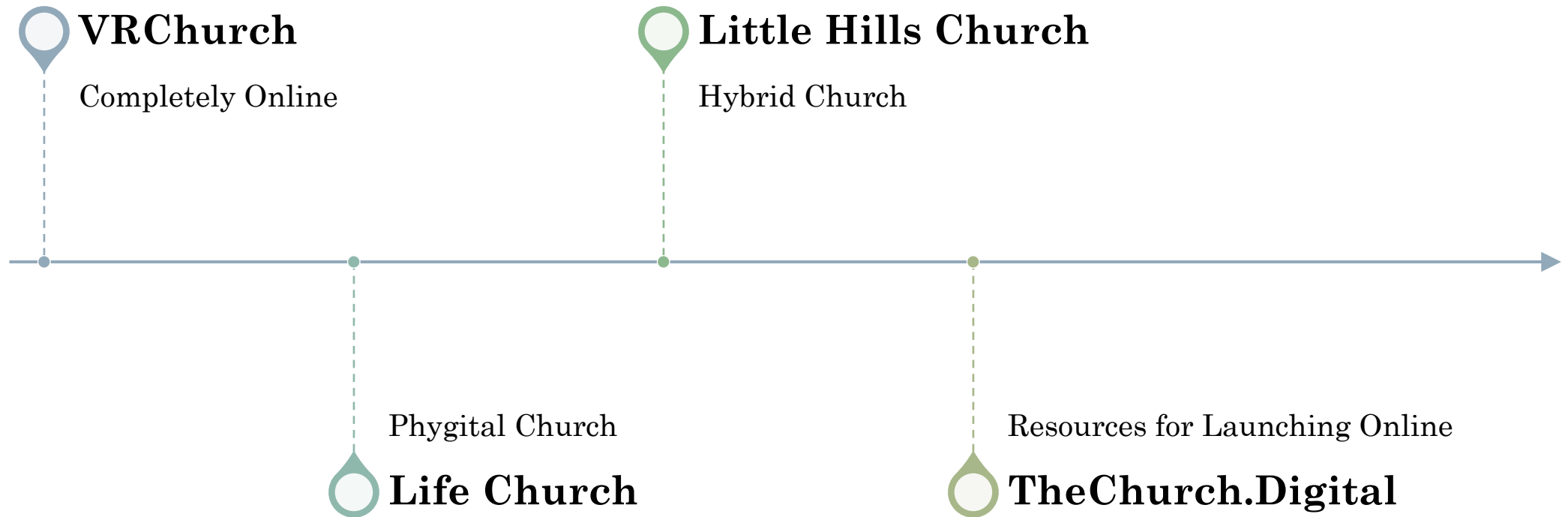
Sending Culture

Digital Services

Metaverse Church
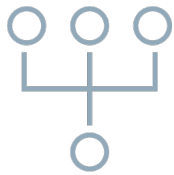
Billions of Active Gamers

171 Million people in VR

- *Jeff Reed*

Reed, Jeff. 2023. "Meeting God in the Metaverse." Evangelical Missions Quarterly 59, no. 3 (September): 38–42.

Current Examples

VRChurch

Completely Online

Little Hills Church

Hybrid Church

Phygital Church

Life Church

Resources for Launching Online

TheChurch.Digital

Contemporary Missiological Implications

Sending Culture   Digital Services   Metaverse Church

Future Case Studies

Raleigh   Kenya   Ethiopia

Future Questions to Consider

- What is the full scope of the VR "Church"?

- Can it be used in countries where believers cannot gather? Is this a useful bridge?

- Will the transition to VR get to a place where someone lives in that reality (like Ready Player One)? If so, we must have a plan to undertake missions in the metaverse.

- How can we utilize VR to train indigenous leaders by extension? Is this feasible?

- Have we missed out on the video game/movie/metaverse arena for too long? Can we catch up?

- What does it mean for someone to be present or local? Can an avatar count as being present? Or does it need to be my physical body?

- How are the ordinances observed? Is this even possible?

Conclusion

- We must cultivate a mindset of looking out instead of looking in, so that all might hear! The need is great.

- We must seek to teach a more robust ecclesiology to our members. If we do this, we might encourage sending and we might be able to better navigate thorny issues in the digital age.

- Lastly, when we teach our members about ecclesiology, we must choose a definition of the local church that highlights the ontological nature of the church as doxological, gospel-centered, Spirit-empowered, local, and sent.

Works Consulted