MATERIAL BELIEFS IN A VIRTUAL CHURCH: A HEURISTIC STUDY OF THE LIMITATIONS OF VIRTUAL RELIGION

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Experiencing religion online has become a major and powerful reaction to the current world religious scene. Online churches use various social media tools and frameworks to construct their online campuses of gathering and worship, which have been slowly dissolving the need for physical locations, and institutional and location-bound churches. For example, to one online religious community, this is based on the notion that with the Internet as “your neighborhood,” “buildings, space and geography can't limit your growth and effectiveness” (Streaming Church, Creating Your Web Campus, n.d.).

However, aside from lacking physical buildings, space, and geography, these online churches inherently are missing some physical elements that have historically been crucial to many traditions within Christianity; namely 1) the physical gathering of believers and 2) the Holy Sacraments. The community of believers as a unit and the sacraments can be seen as materials through which religion may be communicated, and by looking at the rhetoric of a given church body toward these objects, it may possible to see if the responses and attitudes toward these have changed. As these are “remediated” online virtually, does the understanding of these in the new context of the internet change how the religion is communicated? Remediation is a term developed by Marshall McLuhan (2003, pg. 8), which is a repurposing of content from one medium to another. Here however, not only the content looks to be remediated, but the substance as well. The environment in which the beliefs are advocated, namely the church website, has become also the local for the
participation and enactment of those same beliefs. It is possible that environment can influence, in a sense, what Kenneth Burke has termed, the “terministic screens” of those advocating the beliefs (1966, pg. 45). In other words, the words chosen to describe beliefs and practices may be chosen to accommodate the internet as a location for worship, if some elements pose a problem for communication and enactment. Therefore, a particular coloring of terminology by the medium of the Internet can be best seen by examining faith objects, or materials, which would seem otherwise difficult to replicate online.

Many of the materials through which religion has historically and traditionally been communicated and understood can be replicated to an online environment fairly easily: things such a sermon, liturgy, songs, and prayer. Enacting the sacrament of Holy Communion virtually on the other hand inherently involves some problems. In the local physical church, the sacrament has been traditionally conceived, defined, and profoundly understood in phenomenal or physical terms. In this, the objects of faith and the related rituals deal with the “real” and have physical and actual meaning. However, in an online environment, this sacrament cannot exist physically.

The physical gathering of believers and the sacraments mark two physical materials which denote real meaning. A third material which is not physical at all but of utmost importance to Christianity is faith itself. This is to be understood not simply as an individual’s spirituality or a group’s religiosity, but a combination of both, and from where belief is derived. The grounding of faith will be slanted different ways to different groups, either turned inward on a person or group’s own conviction, or turned outward toward material objects or historical events. Faith will be more or less subjective or objective. For this reason, it is also beneficial to study faith as a material; so together studying the
community and the sacraments on an online church compared to a local, physical church, should shed light on what happens as a Christian church is remediated online.

In all, this thesis serves as an initial exploration of how an online Christian church treats the community, sacraments, and faith as “materials” through which the religion itself can be understood. Studying the materiality of an online church in terms of community, sacraments, and faith is a timely and interesting subject, particularly from a communicative perspective, in the ways that these materials serve to unite the community. The three subjects are intimately tied together, and so several questions can be derived when a church is remediated online; questions such as: 1) To advocates of an Online Church, what constitutes online Holy Communion or baptism? 2) In what sense do the members have a common identification, or communion, with each other? (How are they linked as a community?) Other questions arise as well, based on the tendency of social networks to promote lack of control, participation, and sharing of individual experiences, over a shared narrative: 3) Does the experience itself become a sign or object of faith? These three specific questions will help answer the two overarching questions: 1) Given the virtual nature of the Internet, do the beliefs that a church advocates seem to be or become less real or phenomenal when a church predominantly employs religious practices online; and, 2) Given the power and range of responses that individuals can have when responding to Internet content, do the beliefs that a church advocates become more ideocentric and emotional for its online users?

In terms of the significance of this study, as a broad objective, understanding the materiality of an online church will help us to more fully understand the orientation of the Internet toward religion in general. In this regard, this chapter is guided and organized in
terms of four objectives: 1) to explain how the use of the Internet for religious purposes has grown and shifted, and thus how it is crucial to look at the orientation of the Internet toward Christianity. 2) To explain why studying the materiality of an online church meets this objective. 3) To offer a definition of terms for community, the sacraments in both the communicative and ecclesial respects, and for faith. 4) To present conclusions and questions for research. With this preview in mind, we first consider how online religion has emerged.

Part Two: Evolution and Growth of Online Churches

Growth of Online Churches.

Within the past few years, online church communities have skyrocketed, with more and more people willing to try to pursue faith in nontraditional environments. A 2009 study by The Barna Group found that 64% of Americans say they are “completely open to carrying out and pursuing [their] faith in an environment or structure that differs from that of a typical church.” Supplemental studies by The Barna Group define atypical worship environments as house churches, ministries that meet in the marketplace, and spiritual activity on the Internet (Barna, 2008). As a result, a number of online hosting sites are now available, marketing themselves either to existing churches or groups looking to begin an online church campus. These include sites such as lightcastmedia.com (Lightcast Media, n.d), ustream.tv (Ustream, n.d), livestream.com (LiveStream, n.d.), and streamingchurch.tv (Streamingchurch.tv, n.d.). Many more online churches may choose to host the services themselves.

Shift of Online Religion.

For as long as the Internet has been in popular use, religions have used it to serve their purposes. Even in the 1990s one would have been hard-pressed to find a religious
denomination or church body without a website. This phenomenon was plainly the limited remediation talked about by McLuhan (2003), where the content is simply repurposed from one medium to another. Like most websites of the Web 1.0 generation\(^1\) that simply repackaged media content from sources such as newspapers, magazines, video, and film, online religious sites repackaged sermons, religious texts, and other information (whether religious or not), to the new medium. Macnamara (2010, pg. 33) has explained the limits of Web 1.0 further: “Web 1.0 applications involved a one-way ‘push’ of information from producer to users with little or no opportunity for user to comment, give feedback, or contribute content.”

But for Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, “the Web was never intended to be about delivering content to passive audiences, but to be about shared creativity” (Berners-Lee in Boler, 2008, pg. 39). Some religious sites did include this interactive or “inter-creative” model of communication, offering users the ability to email prayer requests, participate in discussion groups, and even visit a virtual church.

Acknowledging the difference between the one-to-many broadcast style delivery system that most religious sites used, and the few interactive communities that existed online, Hellend (2000) proposed a theoretical distinction between the two. This distinction was Religion Online and Online Religion, respectively. Religion Online referred to sites where users could participate in religious activity, Online Religion referred to sites where users were simply given information about the religion.

\(^1\) The Web 1.0 generation, in contrast with Web 2.0 which is the current phase of the Web, was a phase where users were primarily consumers of content. Cormode and Krishnamurthy, (2008) have noted that “any participant can be a content creator in Web 2.0 and numerous technological aids have been created to maximize the potential for content creation” (pg. 2).
However with the limited use of interactivity, neither of the two distinct communication models (one-to-many or interactive) employed by online religious sites seemed to motivate users to become followers, or to form virtual communities. An example of this can be seen by Dawson’s (2000) early study on “Religion on the Internet” and the creation of new religions. Dawson found that new religions were being developed online, but were limited mostly to informal sites, much in the way that anyone with any sort of HTML knowledge could create a webpage to promote some novel idea. ² These new religions, however, failed to create any sort of followers, as these sites were treated as a broadcast medium, delivering ideas from few to many, with little or no way to motivate followers to action or allow participation. Dawson wrote, “Our limited study of the Web pages and Web-masters of thirty new religions suggested that the religious uses of the Internet had yet to evolve much beyond treating the Internet as another information delivery system. Interactive uses of the Internet are still minimal, if they exist at all, and they have yet to be effectively paired with any off-line activities. But the potential to form true virtual communities is there waiting to be exploited, so ongoing study of this issue is warranted.”³

The overall purveyance of the one-way communication model would soon give way to truly interactive uses. Reflecting on his theoretical distinction between Online Religion and Religion Online a few years later, Hellend (2005) pointed out that things had shifted. When he first developed the distinction, he noticed that official religious institutions were reluctant to develop places where people could interact, talk, share, or even argue their

² HTML is Hypertext Markup Language, a language for building webpages
³ Dawson admitted that, at the time, “it remains unclear whether the Internet on its own can serve as an effective medium for mobilizing social movements. At present many observers are Doubtful.” The 2011 events in Egypt which were motivated by Twitter and other social media networks would seem to put an end to this doubt and would further the case for social networks’ ability for motivating to action.
beliefs. Those interactive places, he said, seemed to be relegated to non-official sites whose goal did not include promoting any certain set of information.

Now more than ever, the line is blurred between Religion Online and Online Religion. Religious blogs and vlogs promote information dissemination but attract a group of followers and allow interaction in the form of commenting, remixing, or sharing. Online churches allow for interaction among a community of people, along with the one-way information delivery common in most sermons. The increased interactivity, especially with the explosion of social media has seemed to make churches virtually self-sustainable when existing solely online. This thesis suggests that one possible reason for this is that the three materials mentioned in the introduction have manifested themselves virtually, but if they exactly enable or elicit the same responses remains an open question. This question is one that the field of the materiality of religion is in an appropriate position to answer.

**Part Three: The Materiality of Religion**

The materiality of religion is a growing field within religious studies that begins its concerns not with the beliefs of an individual or group, or even the history and development of religion, but with the materials through which religion is communicated. Since it is concerned with the communicating of religion, this approach is very fitting for a study of an online church and how various materials potentially communicate different things in different contexts. Meyer (2008) has explained the relation between media, materiality, and religion: “The questions about the relation between religion and media, and between religion

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5 This approach is also useful in response to a modern trend in academic scholarship of religions, and can serve to illuminate both the practice and the doctrine. “Material culture is a fruitful way to understand how religion works since many scholars have come to regard belief as shifting sets of practices, as what people do rather than only or primarily the creeds or doctrines to which they assent” (Morgan, pg. 229).
and materiality, converge insofar as media are best understood as material forms around which religious communication evolves” (pg. 133). Materials can “invoke a sense of the divine as present in—and at the same time surpassing—the forms through which it is to be accessed. The attribute ‘material,’ it should be noted, is here not understood in opposition to “spiritual,” but in a manner that seeks to transcend the matter and spirit opposition in the context of which modern religion has been framed as the realm of spirituality: far removed from the materiality, or even materialism, of mundane existence” (pg. 132).

The Internet and Online Churches are media, and media can, in a sense, be a “material” form through which religious ideas are communicated. But insofar as it communicates Christian religious ideas, it must do so in terms of Christian “materials” which may or may not take physical, material form. These may be rituals, objects, texts, places or spaces, and even people. Materials allow religious ideas to be communicated; otherwise it would be impossible to convey any sort of idea or meaning from one person from the next or from the Bible to men. If Christianity was without grounding, it would cease to exist. Keane (2008) has explained the situation well, “And it is certainly the case that some important religious traditions do tend to privilege belief in their own self understandings. But even where belief is crucial, it must still take material form. What do I mean by that? Ideas are not transmitted telepathically. They must be exteriorized in some way, for example, in words, gestures, objects, or practices, in order to be transmitted from one mind to another” (pg. 230).

As the Christian worship service and the church (understood to be the local, physical representation of the universal Church) has been the main arena in which the religion has been communicated for two millennia now, it would seem to be worth studying over any other sort of Christian expression (Christian music, art, movies, etc.). With the relatively
sudden explosion and growth of online churches, and remediation of local, physical churches to online ones, the question for this thesis becomes, “is anything lost or changed in the process?” which helps to answer our guiding questions of “Given the virtual nature of the Internet, do the beliefs that a church advocates seem to be or become less real or phenomenal when a church predominantly employs religious practices online; and, given the power and range of responses that individuals can have when responding to Internet content, do the beliefs that a church advocates become more idiocentric and emotional for its online users?”

As a material, whether it is a text or an aspect of a ritual, is experienced by one person or the next, it may acquire different values and associations based on the interpretation of that material to the individual. Due to the context that the object is experienced or understood, in our case, either in a local, physical church or an online church, the object will hold varying degrees of significance to the group, and thus tell us what is different about each context. This is not to say that the objects themselves do not have some transcendent meaning or a meaning as imposed by their creator (or Creator), but simply that different groups may attach their own meanings and understandings to them.

To this end, it is important that not the objects themselves be studied so much as instead the reactions and understandings to these objects. Morgan (2008) has written on why this distinction is important, “Rather than understanding objects as projectiles bearing the intentions of their makers, it is more productive to study the response to objects as they are displayed, exchanged, destroyed, and circulated in order to determine what they mean to people, that is to say, how they build and maintain life-worlds” (Morgan, pg. 228). This distinction also moves this paper, which deals with the religious, out of the realm of theology.
and into the realm of communication. Some background, however, is first needed on the objects that this thesis concerns itself with.

**Part Four: Definition of Terms**

In order to understand the roles of the community of believers, the Sacraments and faith, it is necessary to understand what is meant by these terms. As materials, they may have different connotations. The Sacrament of Holy Communion, for instance, has sort of a double meaning; a commutative, uniting sense, and also an ecclesial or religious sense. First, what is meant by a community of believers?

**Community.**

Since this thesis is concerned primarily with Christian church bodies, community, understood to be a psychological concept, is referred to as the participants in or members of a church body. Within this church body, there must to some degree be social cohesion amongst the individuals as members or participants. The selective use of symbols is often the most tangible proof that a group is indeed a community, especially in its use of and reaction to particular materials such as crosses, rituals, Scriptural texts, and so on. Indeed, even how the group sees itself as a symbol is a measure of its cohesion.

How a group sees itself is evident in response to what may be the most cited verse from the Bible on community, Matthew 18:19-20 (New King James Version): “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” For confessional religious groups such as the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, agreeing doctrinally is an important pretext for gathering and uniting as a
community—paying special attention to the former part of this verse while certainly not excluding the latter. For others, such as the majority of Protestantism, which has tended to place greater importance on the private spiritual experience of the individual, this verse is a testament to the power of God as being evident among any who gather—even in spite of doctrinal disagreement among members of the same group.

While certainly two opposite sites of the spectrum are represented, there is no doubt that each side would see itself as a real community of believers. The difference is in what way the community is united. This view of community offers a nice segue into the next set of terms, the Sacraments.

**Sacraments.**

A definition which most Christian churches agree on for what a sacrament is has come from Early Church theologian and philosopher, St. Augustine. He defined sacraments as a sort of “visible words,” whereby the power (both communicative and salvific) comes not from the words themselves but also the fact that they are visible, having taken material form. The first sacrament is baptism (Tractates on the Gospel of John).

Baptism, or a washing, has historically been understood as a sign of or the literal admission of a person into the Christian faith. Augustine has also described the power of Baptism as a sacrament,

> Take away the word, and the water is neither more nor less than water. The word is added to the element, and there results the Sacrament, as if itself also a kind of visible word…And whence has water so great an efficacy, as in touching the body to cleanse the soul, save by the operation of the word; and that not because it is uttered, but because it is believed? For even in the word itself the passing sound is one thing, the
abiding efficacy another. ‘This is the word of faith which we preach,’ says the
apostle, ‘that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth that Jesus is the Lord, and shalt
believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved’
(Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John, LXXX, no. 3, pg. 338).

The second sacrament, Communion, has two connotations. In its broad sense,
communion is a communicative concept in which different persons or things are really and
fully communicating with each other. Burke, in identifying different forms of identification
in The Rhetoric of Motives, has defined communion in terms of what it is not: “And so, in the
end, men are brought to that most tragically ironic of all divisions, or conflicts, wherein
millions of cooperative acts go into the preparation for one single destructive act. We refer
to that ultimate disease of cooperation: war. (You will understand war much better if you
think of it, not simply as a strife come to a head, but rather as a disease, or perversion of
communion” (pg. 22). Communion then, as the opposite of an ultimate disease of
cooperation, is ultimate and real cooperation. It would be difficult to find a concept which
has its essence in unity more than communion.

On the other hand, Ecclesial Communion, or religious Communion or Communion of
the Church, is termed synonymously with the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, and Holy
Communion. It is understood to be a Sacrament instituted by Christ, as narrated in the three
synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In Matthew it is written, “And as they were
eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat;
this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink
from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the
remission of sins’” (26:26-28, NKJV).
Holy Communion is further expounded upon in the Gospel of John and letters of St. Paul. In 1 Corinthians the communal aspect of the Lord’s Supper is explained: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (10:16-17, NKJV). Holy Communion is a ritual for Christianity that can be presumed to allow believers to worship communally in a real and ultimate cooperation. Aside from the religious benefits of participation, from a communicative perspective, worshipping communally through the ritual of Holy Communion forms religious identities among the participants and can serve to link and sustain the community.

The meaning of communion as an ultimate and real cooperation is shown most evidently in the terms Ecclesial Communion or Holy Communion. Modern theologian and titular Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas has written: “It is not by accident that the Church has given to the Eucharist the name of ‘Communion’. For in the Eucharist we can find all the dimensions of communion: God communicates himself to us, we enter into communion with him, the participants of the sacrament enter into communion with one another, and creation as a whole enters through man into communion with God” (2006, pg. 7)

Tying both communion and community together, Casey, noting the practice of Holy Communion to St. John’s Internet Church, explained a caveat to virtual Holy Communion: “In Internet Church, unless several people are gathered together in front of the same computer screen, the commonality and fellowship exists only as what Benedict Anderson terms an “imagined community” of fellow believers accessing the ritual on their own time” (2006, pg. 82).
Faith.

For the purposes of this thesis, faith is understood not to be saving faith, a true conviction or a true reliance. Such a faith would be impossible to determine. Instead, as something that would be possible to look at, faith can understood to be cognitive, what a person or group thinks about their beliefs, where the basic underlying notions of meaning and truth come from. As with the rest of the materials this thesis is studying, we are more concerned about the reaction to the material, rather than the material itself. With this view of faith, examining ideas of where meaning and truth come from, it would be possible to determine the point of reference for faith; whether or not faith has shifted from between being entirely grounded and material, individual, or collective in origins. Faith after all is the foundation for Christianity, and so an examining of the “response[s] to objects as they are displayed, exchanged, destroyed, and circulated” is crucial in understanding how people “build and maintain life-worlds” (Morgan, 2008, pg. 228).

As posited in the introduction, a virtual experiencing of the sacraments and a virtual uniting of a community might suggest a less material faith. Physical elements and a physical gathering of people offer a certain grounding of the transcendent, that when the same is remediated online, could offer a virtual representation instead. To what end can there be a virtual representing that allows the religion to stay consistent?

Losing material grounding, man may try to pursue meaning individually and for his own interests, remaining “unique, an individual locus of motives,” to use Burke’s terms. However, they may join in a community to share their individual interests: “Similarly, two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an ‘identification’ that does not deny their distinctness” (1969, p. 21). St. Augustine, perhaps
recognizing the need for a material grounding of Christianity, wrote “It is impossible to keep men together in one religious denomination, whether true or false, except they be united by means of visible signs or sacraments” (Contra Faust xix).

Part Five: Conclusion

The need to study online churches’ practices of Holy Communion has increased since religious use of the internet was previously seen as an either/or of Online Religion or Religion Online. In the either/or paradigm, researchers such as Dawson (2000) claimed that people were more likely to supplement their online religious experience with an offline one: “In the end, on-line communities are most likely to succeed, to truly effect peoples' lives, when they are paired with other off-line involvements. It seems plausible, then, that virtual religious communities are a real possibility - in this delimited sense” (pg. 41). However, now that the Internet has become much more of a blend between online religion and religion online, individuals who before were merely supplementing their offline religious experiences, now may use the Internet as their primary means for religious experience, and offline means to supplement the online. As a community, the Sacraments, and faith are necessary aspects of Christianity, historically understood to have a certain material grounding, it is important that an in depth study of the materiality of online churches be undertaken.

Problem Definition.

Understanding how an online church is different from a local, physical church as it is remediated on the internet is crucial in helping to understand the orientation of the Internet toward religion in general. Several questions have been outlined in this introduction in regards to community, the sacraments, and faith. What constitutes an online ritual of Holy
Communion? Without the physical presence of others, are the members or participants in communion with each other? Does the experience itself (rather than the Words plus the elements as Augustine as noted) become some sort of sacrament, or a sign or object of faith?

This thesis attempts to answer these questions in the four chapters that remain in this thesis in hopes to answer the guiding questions: 1) Given the virtual nature of the Internet, do the beliefs that a church advocates seem to be or become less real or phenomenal when a church predominantly employs religious practices online; and, 2) Given the power and range of responses that individuals can have when responding to Internet content, do the beliefs that a church advocates become more idiocentric and emotional for its online users? Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature relevant to the questions raised in this chapter. Chapter three outlines the method of analysis employed in this thesis. Chapter four provides an application of this method, and chapter five concludes by offering a discussion of findings, limitations, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter II: Literature Review & Theoretical Background

This thesis isolates and then compares and considers the terminology used to discuss beliefs in two different churches. While a study of an online religious community is nothing new, this research is particularly useful for scholars of online religion. This chapter serves to situate this study among the current online religious field of scholarly research, and call attention to how the study of terminology surrounding tangible materials fills a void in the current literature and studies of online religion.

Part One: The Electronic/Internet Age and Religious Change

In contrast to earlier studies, such as done by Dawson in 2000, which doubted the effectiveness and sustainability of online religious groups, and merely noted that the potential was there to create religious virtual communities, more recent work (such as Jones, 2007) provides evidence of how and in what ways these virtual communities are real. An area lacking study is how these realities are different.

In his book Religion in Human Evolution, Bellah (2011) has discussed the way that humans are living in multiple realities simultaneously. The “world of daily life,” as he has called it, “operates in standard time and standard space” and is “based on a fundamental anxiety, ultimately, though not necessarily consciously, arising from the knowledge of fear and death (italics are original).” This is contrasted with what might be termed escapism, where activities we participate in deliberately alter the conditions of the world of daily life.
Religion as a reality would fit here, “where doubt about the world as it appears is often fundamental” (pg. 2). But in demonstrating that religion is just as much of a reality as real life, saying “certainly religious worlds are as variable as the worlds of daily life,” Bellah has voided reality - the reality of daily life, the reality of science, and especially the reality of religion - of any ontological reality. His perception of what constitutes a reality is derived from a postmodern worldview and may be the very thing which has contributed to the growth of emergent churches in the last generation. Hipps (2005) in *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture* has argued that the Electronic Age, with its various visual and audio technologies, has contributed to the proliferation of postmodernism in society as well as in religion. “The graphic and electronic revolutions of the 19th century created the conditions necessary for the rise of the postmodern age. In the same way the printing press gave rise to modernity, electronic media were the primary agents in bringing about postmodernity, demolishing our concentration on abstract doctrine, and changing our beliefs about truth” (pg. 64). In an emergent worship gathering, Hipps has explained the scene as sensibly aesthetic and the motive as what Bellah has termed an “experiencing a union of subject and object, a wholeness that overcomes all partiality” (2011, pg. 5). In Hipps’ words, “experiential participation is the main emphasis in such a gathering” (2005, pg. 146).

The largest online churches have grown directly from the emergent church movement, so studying these churches in context with the religious assumptions of the church body is paramount. If Hipps is correct in that electronic culture has contributed to a postmodern tendency in emergent churches, the question remains, has internet culture contributed to or caused a new orientation for online churches? Despite the various writings on the realities of religion in terms of local, physical churches and in terms of online churches, a careful, in-
depth study has yet to be undertaken to compare and contrast online churches verses local physical churches, at least beyond surface phenomena such as differences in interpersonal communication, or the roles of religious leadership and changes in authority.

New orientations on items essential to religion, as well as to important communicative aspects of church bodies, such as the type of community, type of sacrament, and perhaps most important, the assumption of what faith itself is may be found in online churches. These items would fall under a process of how existing theology is shaped by various uses of technology rather than a passive process by which entirely new theologies are created solely by using technology.

In an early TIME article on Online Religion, Finding God on the Web, Ramo (1996) suggested that the Internet was changing God. Almost paralleling Bellah on his notions of reality, Ramo quotes Turkel, a professor of the sociology of science at M.I.T and Gibson, a science fiction writer:

The Internet, [Turkel] says, exists as a world of its own, distinct from earthly reality, crafted by humans but now growing out of human control. ‘God created a set of conditions from which life would emerge. Like it or not, the Internet is one of the most dramatic examples of something that is self-organized. That's the point. God is the distributed, decentralized system.’…‘It seems as though the Net itself has become conscious,’ says William Gibson… ‘It may regard itself as God. And it may be God on its own terms.’ Gibson hastens to add, however, that he is ‘carefully ambivalent’ about whether anything that exists solely on the Net applies to the real world (1996, pg. 6).
Hutchings (2010), in *The Internet and Church: and Introduction*, briefly explained how theories of new theologies, being developed as a direct consequence of the Web, have been mostly dissolved: “Speculation about “hypertheology” has been replaced by careful studies of the process through which existing theology shapes and is shaped by engagement with new media” (pg. 12). The process of how theology shapes and is shaped by engagement with new media is undertaken in different recent theoretical approaches. Hutchings claimed that each of these approaches “helps dispel the idea of ‘technological determinism,’ which focuses on the power of technology to shape society without acknowledging the active role played by users.” He found that works such as by Casey (2006) and Campbell (2005) show that new theologies are not being created by technology, but admit that the phenomenon is more complex than the claim that “humanity is somehow being led by technology rapidly going out of control” (George, 2006, para. 1). Hutchings has said, “Users decide how, when, where and why to integrate a new medium or device into their lives and communities, and the relationships of influence between technology and society are complex and unpredictable.”

However, it seems there is a middle ground between Ramo’s argument and Hutching’s. Hutching’s examples included studies done primarily on the significance of religious authority and communication among the participants, things which may or may not necessarily change the theology of a particular group. On the other hand, Ramo’s citations exclude human involvement in changing their theology, calling the Web “God on its own terms.” While the Internet may not be radically creating entirely new religions, any change in belief or practice of a religious group is a change in theology. Indeed, for the purposes of
this thesis, it is argued that the terminology used to explain such beliefs or practices could, in part, be determined by the new medium of the Internet.

The final caution by Gibson in Ramo’s article poses an interesting question to us as well: “can a church that exists solely on the Net apply to the real world?” Here we must ask the question, have churches that exist on the Internet modified their theology in terms of type of reality, type of community, type of sacrament, or assumption of faith, from their transference from a local physical church? In this mode of thinking, taking the faith of a particular religion into consideration is crucial to understanding the differences between the online and local physical churches.

**Part Two: Faith in Religion**

For any academic study of religion, the rituals, practices, and uses of and attitudes toward technology must be studied in context with the beliefs of the particular religious group, for technology does not exist in a vacuum. For instance, an addition of a projection screen to two churches may be expected to produce the same result. But if one church happens to be a mainline evangelical church and one is a liturgical Catholic church, an introduction of a projection screen will produce entirely different results, though it may be an indication in a shift of theology. However, we cannot become overzealous in studying how a particular group uses technology, (that would move this study into a new realm entirely, and has already been researched somewhat thoroughly).

If a study of an online church is to be carried out and compared with a local, physical church through their respective websites, the underlying assumptions and beliefs must be consistent between the two churches, or at least consistent on paper. If differences are found, then we can say that it is because of the technology. If an online church was compared with
a local, physical church which did not already share the same assumptions and beliefs and differences were found, then it would be foolish to attribute the differences to technology.

**Part Three: Existing Study of the Materiality of Religion**

As noted in chapter one, several scholars from different fields have explained how and why religion is material. The three areas of materiality that this paper is concerned with have also been researched, though none of the present studies adequately answer the question, “Do the beliefs that a church advocates seem to be or become less real or phenomenal when a church predominantly employs religious practices online.”

**Community.**

While the study of online religion is an increasingly growing field, few online churches have been studied in direct contrast with an offline counterpart. Jones’ (2007) comparison of St. Pixels Church of the Internet and St. Luke’s United Methodist Church did so, but in terms of types of community. She found that the online church demonstrated a rhetorical vision of *koinonia* as the type of community, while the local, physical church demonstrated a rhetorical vision of *ekklesia.* While her recognition of the differences in the two communities may prove helpful, the fact that each type of community was already a *recognized* type of community in the belief systems of each church suggests that her study did not go far enough and that additional differences may exist between online and local, physical churches, especially in terms of what is seen as material.

Goh (2008) in *Megachurch Practice: Embodiment of Contemporary Evangelical Protestantism* conducted a study of Christian Megachurches and found a “materialization” of

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6 Koinonia is the Koine Greek word for “fellowship” or “participation.” Ekklesia is the Koine Greek word for “congregation” or “gathering.”
God in the community itself. The materialization of God in the community, while not an online one, was in stark contrast with what he called “overt embodiments of the physical form of God seen in such practices as iconography and ritual enactments” (pg. 295). As the community grew to thousands of attendees each weekend, participants saw the growth as being “actually modified” by God, and therefore an icon of God’s own body. “In this logic, the bigger the church and all its related activities, the bigger the God that is referred to as the ‘Object’ behind the church and (implicitly and often explicitly) the clearer the sign of God’s favor upon this particular church” (pg. 296).

The collective experience of the entire community together caused the materialization of God among them, though it has yet to be studied whether or not an online community would also see the materialization of God as a real occurrence. It is also left to question what happens when the community itself is not manifested materially together, but virtually, online by a number of separated individuals through computer-mediated means.

Along these lines, though in a very different religion, Scheifinger (2010) studied Hindu religious activity in cyberspace, specifically looking at what the existence of cyberspace meant for the body, asking “Where or what is the body in cyberspace?” (pg. 197). In Hinduism, detachment from the body is a goal, but physical embodiment is nonetheless vital. By studying an online puja ceremony, Scheifinger found that,

As it is highly unlikely that someone conducting an online puja would feel like they were at the deity’s sacred site, online pujas do not seem to involve telepresence.\(^7\)

Nonetheless, the participant does to some extent leave his or her body. This is because devotees are able to perform some of the puja processes without reference to

\(^7\)According to Scheifinger, the puja is a form of “‘worship’ [which] involves the presentation of ‘honour offerings’ to the deity. The ritual is a central aspect of most forms of Hinduism and traditionally necessitates full embodiment” (pg. 196).
the body, and they are able to perform an activity which normally requires a physical presence at a venue. Performing the activity online means that the traditional embodied religious experience is unobtainable (pg. 198).

It seems as though a void is left in the traditional Hindu ritual; may it be the same for an online Christian church, and if so, in what way, and is the void filled by something else?

Finally, in one of the earliest introductions to religion on the internet, Dawson (2000) had recognized an issue which it seems has been largely unanswered in research today. “The self is defined and develops in interaction with others, and by coping with true otherness. But computer-mediated interactions may embody “a situation in which ‘the other is not really other, but is actually a moment in [one's] own self-becoming”’ (Foster, 1997, pg. 27 in Dawson, 2000, pg. 39).

Sacraments.

The second area of materiality is the Christian understanding of a sacrament. In Virtual Ritual, Real Faith, Casey (2006) studied a single internet enactment of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Casey noticed similarities to a non-virtual enactment: “The physical objects of bread and wine point beyond themselves to the physical body and blood of Christ; as symbols, the ritual objects provide access to something or make something present. As enacted symbol, the ritual itself does the same” (pg. 83). But here, Casey also noticed a problem. In physical materials, the objects provided access to something “virtual,” but if the materials were already virtual, as in the case of the online ritual, the materials provided access to “what is otherwise unseen – the virtual” The problem as Casey has termed it, “the divine is made present still as a non-presence, or a virtual presence” (pg. 83).
Casey admitted that the study created more questions than it answered, and recognized an area in need of future research: the context in which rituals are enacted. How different contexts cause these rituals to communicate different things, and even on a larger scale, “how changes in media environments contribute to changes in the way a society perceives, thinks about, and behaves in the world” (pg. 84).

Along the same vein, O’Leary (1996) has speculated “on the transformation of religious beliefs and practices as these are mediated by new technologies” (pg. 782). By using a framework developed by Walter Ong, O’Leary, in Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks, explored the impact that print culture had on the nature and functions of word and symbol in Christian liturgy. O’Leary used the protestant Reformation as a case study to demonstrate how the printing press and an age of literacy and print undoubtedly brought about the new protestant theology, in terms of its orientation away from “the magical efficacy of language that Ong finds characteristic of an earlier stage of primary orality” (pg. 788). O’Leary claimed that the transformation to print not only emphasized the preached Word, but caused a change in Eucharistic theology. In the Catholic Eucharist, there is a unity of signifier and signified, the Word of God spoken by the priest and the visible objects together form the spiritual reality. In radical protestant theology, the liturgy divested itself of the mystery of the Eucharist (pg. 789).8

While providing a theoretical background for a change in theology that may be happening due to electronic media today, O’Leary stopped short of examining that change through similar religious bodies. Instead, he examined neo-pagan online rituals and found

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8 To come to this conclusion however, O’Leary jumped from Catholic theology to radical Protestant theology through the mechanism of the printing press, attributing the breakthrough to Martin Luther. Luther’s reformation however is classified as conservative, and his sacramental theology in fact aligned more with the mysterious Catholic theology.
that online rituals attempt to restructure and integrate the minds and emotions of individuals, essentially making emotion the test for efficacy for ritual action. “Rooted in textuality, ritual action in cyberspace is constantly faced with the evidence of its own quality as constructed, as arbitrary, and as artificial, a game played with no material stakes or consequences; but the efficacy of ritual is affirmed, time and time again, even in the face of a full, self-conscious awareness of its artificiality” (pg. 804).

O’Leary’s observations are helpful in that they infer that Christian theology, when experienced online in the form of a ritual, is drifting even more away from the material and toward a more textual, symbolic, and more emotional state. However, a thorough study of the remediation from a local physical church to an online church would serve to validate this trend.

**Faith.**

The third area of “materiality”, as mentioned earlier, is more difficult to identify, and, consequently has been studied the least. Importantly, this area is tied directly with the other two material areas. Beliefs must have grounding or point of reference, a certain “materiality” to them in order to make them sustainable. As the author of the essay *On Materiality of Religion*, Keane (2008) has said, “Otherwise [religious ideas] remain idiosyncratic and unsupported by the rest of that person’s social existence” (pg. 230). Faith must be understood to be a balance between spirituality and religiousness. “While spirituality is commonly associated with transcendence and the personalization of faith, religiousness can rather be linked with ‘a formalized and institutionalized manifestation of faith’” (2008, Martinez, Corduneanu, & Martinez, pg. 214). Certainly faith, at least Christian faith, must have both. The balance between subjectivity and objectivity is crucial.
Faith, to the believer, is also intrinsically linked to truth and meaning. The source of truth and meaning however, depends on the balance of faith between being a subjective and objective concept. The basic underlying notion of this may more aptly be called a worldview, but a worldview that has very direct implications from where a group of people or a church derives its beliefs. If local or physical Emergent churches have a postmodern leaning as Hipps (2005) has claimed, their very faith might be shown to be derived out of the postmodern concept of a shared narrative or a collective group experience, rather than on textual or “abstract” doctrine (pg. 64).

This collective group experience is clearly exemplified in the study done by Goh (2008) on megachurches mentioned earlier, whereby God’s “greatness,” and blessing is visible in the size of the church (pg. 296). Goh also found that beliefs about God were enacted in other ways as well, particularly in the different visual media that were used, which together created an experience that coalesced “into an experience of massive solidity and corporeality, which offers a reassuring presence as a supplement to (if not in lieu of) the experience of the presence of the invisible God” (pg 296).

The media, alongside the largeness of the church, provided not just an affirmation for, but a foundation of the church’s faith. Goh continued, “The significance, impact and likely continued success of megachurches…also rests on a much more basic cognitive level than merely copying features of corporations and mass media. It consists in large part in the multifarious and nuanced techniques of ‘embodying’ the experience of God in evangelical Protestantism, of translating the invisible and transcendent God into the body-sized signs and images which provide accessible cues for the human participant” (pg. 301). That experience
is the soteriological point of reference for many of the churches of the Emergent tradition as well as many recent scholars.\(^9\)

Kluver and Chen (2008) conducted an ethnographic study of St. Pixels Church of the Internet in which they examined “To what extent it is possible for the online, virtual church experiment to create an authentically spiritual experience” (pg. 130). They studied the use of three “means of grace:” prayer, Bible study, and communion, as well as other aspects of the online church that contribute to participants regarding it as “church-like” (pg. 130). They found a constant juxtaposing of the sacred and the profane through the church’s own doing. “The Church of Fools invites worshippers to ‘play’ with the texts at hand…Worship on the church of fools requires one to make choices, to click on one’s avatar to make it kneel or sing, or even, to which object to worship (icon or vending machine?)” (pg. 136). By nature the worship itself was also found to be cross-denominational without any firm structure, which Kluver and Chen claimed “Also throws up a juxtaposition of meanings and interpretations.” For example, two of the choices available to the worshipper are crossing self or Hallelujah. Whereas a pious Catholic might cross him or herself, it would most likely be a Charismatic who would stand up, raise her hands, and say ‘Hallelujah.’ Yet both options are equally available in the church of Fools, and both are engaged in by multiple participants. This sort of postmodernist and anti-institutional experience allows worshippers to ‘mix and match’ the ‘means of grace’ through which they attain spiritual experiences (pg. 136).

It seems clear that this anti-institutional and anti-structural experience was exactly the structure imposed on the participants; the beliefs of the church lacked a certain “materiality”.

\(^9\) Soteriology is words about or the study of religious doctrines of salvation
Perhaps as a result, the Church of Fools closed its virtual doors not long after. It is now open only to individual visits (Church of Fools, 2012).

**Part Four: Summary and Need for Further Research**

The question remains through this study by Kluver and Chen as well as the others mentioned in this chapter; does the point of reference of faith stay consistent or change when a church transitions from a local, physical entity, to an online one? Finding an answer to this question is possible when the point of reference for faith is examined, and sheds light on the two guiding questions for this thesis. Arguing that studying the terminology surrounding the three materials mentioned – community, sacraments, and faith in two Christian churches, one online church and one local, physical church, that differ primarily only in their communication context – will allow these questions to be answered. Chapter three outlines the methodology that is used to explore material beliefs in a virtual church and a local physical church.
Chapter III: Methods for Analysis

This chapter outlines the procedures used to critically examine the beliefs advocated through the responses and actions of two Christian churches toward the community, sacraments, and faith.

Accordingly this chapter is divided into three parts which also parallel the goals of this chapter: First to identify and describe the two objects of study, the local, physical church and the online church. In addition, the existing theology that deals with the material is examined. Second, to summarize the research method, and to suggest that in order to adequately determine if a change has occurred due to the medium and new context of the internet, that it is necessary to look longitudinally at the development of the church over time. This is in addition to comparing the two churches as they exist today. Ethnographic research, especially how it is employed in an online environment is described, along with artifact analysis and cluster criticism. Finally, this chapter serves to identify ethics and the authorship stance. This concluding goal and section also provides justification with the goals of this thesis.

Part One: Churches Being Studied

The two churches being studied, it should be noted, are actually two different entities of one larger church body. LifeChurch.tv has been selected as the element of study because
it contains both local, physical churches and one online church under the auspices of the same institution. This allows for a degree of uniformity and control in terms of doctrinal stances, as noted in chapter two that would be unobtainable by studying two uniquely different churches, perhaps even in the same denomination. To examine these local, physical and online churches and the responses to the aforementioned materials, this thesis employs ethnographic research and artifact analysis, and analysis and interpretation through cluster criticism. The methods explained in this chapter serve to identify the differences between the two bodies that are then identified, described, interpreted, and evaluated in chapter four.

As mentioned in chapter two, the study of two entities within one particular church body allows for a uniform foundation for beliefs, at least as far as doctrinal statements are concerned. Beyond this important aspect, LifeChurch.tv is identified as the object of study for two other reasons. First, the church as an institution clearly demonstrates the shift mentioned in chapter one that has been taking place in online religion. Second, the sheer scale and growth of LifeChurch.tv in recent years makes it worthy of study from a social perspective.

**LifeChurch.tv and the Online Religion Shift.**

LifeChurch.tv has been at the forefront of the paradigm of online religious interactivity since its early days in what was then termed an “Internet Campus” (LifeChurch.tv, 2006). The shift in religion on the Internet, as well as in general on the Internet, toward becoming more social and interactive was paralleled by LifeChurch.tv’s internet campus. To indicate this shift further, the online campus itself underwent a name change, first becoming Online Campus 2.0 in 2007 (Swerve, 2007), and then finally becoming “Church Online” in December of 2009 (Swerve, 2009). As the name “campus”
implied, the online “church” was seen even by its creators as a mere extension of the embodied institution. However, the transition to Church Online signified a shift in which visitors to the site could now legitimately function as participants in a church that existed solely online. The tools that the online church used helped facilitate this possibility. These tools included a video of the weekly message posted on the church’s website from the earliest days of the church (LifeChurch.tv, 2003) pastoral and leadership blogs, a Facebook church app that was developed in 2007 (Swerve, 2008) and perhaps most importantly to the interactivity, a live chat which opened up at the beginning of each video message.

The interactivity of LifeChurch.tv has an additional benefit for the purpose of research as well. As Kruger (2005) has said, “While traditional media like books, magazines, and television enable us to see only the supplier and the supplies on the religious market, the Internet – as an interactive medium – now makes it possible to be aware of the consumer’s perspective as well. By observing Internet chat rooms, guest books, frequently asked questions (FAQs, 2012), and discussion forums and discussion lists (which are normally archived) on religion-related Web sites in particular, we can observe the way religious knowledge is spread in an online community in detail” (pg. 1).

Today LifeChurch.tv has become even more interactive, and has developed multiple social applications including “babelwith.me,” a real-time chat translator for communicating with others in up to 45 different languages simultaneously, “OPEN,” an open source site for downloading and sharing religious materials, and “youversion,” a mobile and interactive Bible application (Resources, 2012). On January 9, 2012 LifeChurch.tv launched “Church Online Platform,” which is the digital platform and framework of video plus chat interface which is used for its own Church Online. In this release, perhaps the most telling of the
interactive nature of LifeChurch.tv yet, the platform has the potential to be hugely influential in its capacity to essentially give away for free the ability to any church to create its own “Church Online” (Church Online Platform, 2012).

**Scale and Growth of LifeChurch.tv.**

These tools collectively have broadened the reach of LifeChurch.tv. According to a June 6, 2011 LifeChurch.tv Swerve blog post by LifeChurch.tv Pastor and Innovation Leader Bobby Gruenewald, OPEN.LifeChurch.tv has allowed 70,000 church leaders to download over 2 million resources to use in churches and ministries in 100 countries around the world (Swerve, 2012). With 15 local physical locations, as well as Church Online which hosts over 40 services weekly, LifeChurch.tv claims to reach a “Global Audience” (Locations & Times, 2012). Of those 40 services hosted by Church Online, many were added in 2010 alone. According to the LifeChurch.tv 2010 annual report, “21 Weekend Experiences were added through LifeChurch.tv Campuses & Church Online” (Annual Report, 2012). In late 2011, Outreach Magazine in its annual listing of the “100 largest and fastest-growing churches in America” listed LifeChurch.tv at number two, with around 39,000 in weekly attendance (2011). This is nearly double the 2009 statistics, when 26,776 people gathered every weekend for worship at its 13 physical campuses, according to an article in USA Today (2009).

Given the available statistics, it is clear the popularity of LifeChurch.tv is enormous. As measured by its popularity, LifeChurch.tv is a significant manifestation of the Christian Church. Therefore an analysis of LifeChurch.tv in regards to the communication dimensions of the physical gathering of believers, the sacraments, and faith, can provide valuable insight concerning the phenomenon of online religion.
**LifeChurch.tv, Church Online.**

With the range of online social tools available for users of LifeChurch.tv to use, and the potential to use any number of them to perform religious functions, it is necessary to define what is actually meant by Church Online.

On LifeChurch.tv’s website, Church Online is organized with its 14 other local, physical locations or campuses. Since the point of entry for Church Online is the website, Church Online appropriately is the default location to which the “Locations & Times” page points to (Locations & Times, 2012). The Church Online page (see appendix A, figure 1), beyond the main navigation bar and Locations & Times Select Camps drop down, has three main areas with a total of six headings. The first area contains information that would be expected of any church website: location, times, and contact information. Under the heading titled “Experience Times,” Church Online, instead of listing service times, has written, “With over 40+ times during the week, targeting a global audience, with experiences that will work for whatever timezone you're in!” Directly underneath this enthusiastic description is a large persuasive button which reads “Try Church Online.” Next to the “Experience Times” heading is a heading called “Location.” Here the location is simply a large picture containing images of the website and of Senior Pastor, Craig Groeschel. This large picture mirrors the Location heading containing a button with another suggestion, “Give church online a try.” Underneath this is the third heading, “Contact Information.” The second section is titled “Visit our community on Facebook” and includes links to different parts LifeChurch.tv’s Facebook page. The third section lists the pastors and coordinators for Church Online under the heading “Staff,” and finally an invitation to “hang back and observe for awhile” and “learn more about us” under the heading “First Time Here?.”
After entering into a new page, Live.LifeChurch.tv, through either the “Try Church Online” or “Give church online a try” buttons, the visitor is at the location of the Church Online experience (see appendix A, figure 3.2). This page is divided into two segments, with a video window comprising the majority of the first segment. Text below the video asks visitors “Are you hurting? Need to talk to someone” (sic) and a button allow visitors to “Request a Prayer.” Other buttons allow visitors to share the experience through Facebook, Twitter, or E-mail. During times when no experience is happening, a large countdown to the next event is displayed in the second segment, as well as a schedule of events and a summary of recent conversation. When an experience is occurring, this segment becomes a chat window allowing visitors to become participants. Inside of the video window, clickable buttons appear at specified times during the experience which beg users to, among other things, “raise a hand to Jesus.”

These two pages are what compromise Church Online. While all of the interactive social tools mentioned earlier, such as youversion and OPEN, may serve supplemental means in a Church Online experience, it is the video, the chat window, and a few additional buttons which seem to make up the “experience.”

Next it is necessary to identify and characterize independently the local, physical entity of LifeChurch.tv that is examined in this study.

**LifeChurch.tv, the Local Physical Campuses.**

Just as this thesis takes its data for Church Online from its website and web pages that reference it, the same is done for the local physical churches. All research was done through the website. With that in mind, much valuable information can and has been found about the local physical campuses.
Edmond, Oklahoma is the home of LifeChurch.tv, which was founded in 1996, “with nothing more than a vision from God and a handful of people” (History, 2007). Although a comparison of one specific local physical church with Church Online could illumine differences, in order to give a more complete picture of the differences between Church Online and a local physical church, all LifeChurch.tv physical locations are referenced. It is through this comprehensive comparison that a church by church anomaly, in terms of different theological or ideological understandings, can more easily be avoided.

Each local physical campus webpage (see appendix A, figure 3) is nearly identical to the LifeChurch.tv Church Online page, with a few key exceptions. First, the “Experience Times” are listed; in addition to yet another button encouraging visitors to “Try Church Online” if they can’t make it to the times or if they want to “get a feel for it first.” Second, under the “Location” heading is a driving map showing the physical location of the church. Little can be said concerning any surface differences in theology between the local and physical LifeChurch.tv and Church Online, since both churches view the same recorded message from Senior Pastor Craig Groeschel as the main aspect to each weekly experience; each have the same polity and organizational structure, with Craig Groeschel as the head; and each promote the exact same mission, “To lead people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ” (Who is LifeChurch.tv, 2012).

As a result of the uniformity, the communicative differences in terms of the three materials that this thesis is concerned with are more easily and accurately discernable. Nevertheless, given the tremendous variations among Christian churches and groups, it is necessary that LifeChurch.tv be segmented apart from the whole of Christianity and studied
in accord with its own theological positions. A limited survey of these positions is outlined in the following subsection.

**Congregation & Membership.**

In brief, LifeChurch.tv has described itself as “a Christian church. We follow Jesus, we teach from the Bible, and we worship God as the creator and ruler of the universe” (Beliefs, 2012). Of course this is characteristic of most churches which claim to be Christian, but LifeChurch.tv also has acknowledged that is it affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church. This Christian Denomination, as LifeChurch.tv has described, is a “rapidly growing multi-ethnic denomination in the United States and Canada with ministries on five continents of the world” (Beliefs, 2012). The Evangelical Covenant Church (From here on known as ECC) is a denomination with beliefs and doctrinal understandings in part from the teaching of Jakub Arminius and John Wesley. This segment of Christianity that reflects the influence of these men is unique in that it emphasizes Christian living over doctrinal teachings. LifeChurch.tv has affirmed this teaching, “In Non-Essential Beliefs, we have liberty…So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God” (Beliefs, 2012).

Emphasizing Christian living over doctrinal teaching was a key point to the Pietistic movement, and the Covenant Church, by its own admission in its *Covenant Affirmations Booklet* (2005), is also heavily influenced by this seventeenth-century spiritual renewal movement, and in particular, a leading figure in this movement, Phillip Jakob Spener. The Booklet has explained Speners teachings, “particularly important was his call for widespread reading and study of the Bible; greater participation by lay people in the work of the Church; simple, clear, and direct preaching geared to the needs of the people; and the abandonment of theological hair-splitting in favor of practical concern for living the Christian life.” (pg. 6)
The practical concern for living the Christian life can also be found in the existing affirmations and theological positions on the three materials items that this thesis is concerned with.

**Existing Theology.**

In defining the Church as a fellowship of believers, the ECC has claimed also to follow the “daring suggestion” of Martin Luther: “[Christians] should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and do other Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reproved, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ (Matthew 18:15-17)” (2005, pg. 13; from Leopold, 1965, pg. 53). In this statement Luther provided a standard for whom would be known as a Christian, namely as praying, reading, being baptized, and receiving the sacrament [of Holy Communion]; and it would be around these that the visible church would itself would be manifest. In the words of the Booklet, “the ideal church (local physical church) as a gathering of those who confess faith in Jesus Christ, commit themselves to each other, and submit to no authority other than Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church” (2005, pg. 13).

Following this teaching of Luther, the ECC further expanded the fellowship of believers, “characterized by mutual participation in and sharing of the new life in Christ,” emphasizing its active role of participating in “Christ’s mission to the world” (pg. 14). Here, it is important to note that the *Covenant Affirmations Booklet* is not talking about a local physical church or gathering of believers as Luther was. The Church which the Booklet has defined here is the Church in the wide sense, as in all Christians. This Church is indeed a “gathered community”, but one which is “not simply a human institution or organization, but
a people whom God has called. Emphasis does not fall on buildings or hierarchical structures, but upon a grace-filled fellowship and active participation, through the Holy Spirit, in the life and mission of Christ” (pg. 14).

According to the nomenclature used in the Booklet, it is as if the active participating in “evangelism, formation, worship, and service” are also marks of the visible church. Indeed, the Covenant Church is used synonymously with the Church (in the wide sense of the term). “Membership in the Covenant Church is by confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ. It is open to all believers. We do not expect that believers will agree on every detail of Christian belief.” While these two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, there would seem to be a discrepancy as to what a visible church is. On the one hand, the ECC affirms with Luther that the visible church 1) should meet in a house somewhere for the purposes to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and do other Christian works; and 2) others may be reproved, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated of this church. However on the other hand, the standards for membership in the Evangelical Covenant Church are the same as that for the whole Christian Church, 1) the only requirement is that one be “born anew ‘into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3)” (pg. 14); and 2) membership is open to all believers, but “also open only to believers” (pg. 15).

These definitions are significant; especially considering the local physical LifeChurch.tv, Edmond presumably meets the first set of requirements, more so than LifeChurch.tv, Church Online.

The use and function of the sacraments also must be mentioned before examining each church. In regards to baptism, the Covenant Affirmations Booklet has explained, “the Evangelical Covenant Church celebrates two divinely ordained sacraments, baptism and the
Lord’s Supper. Recognizing the reality of freedom in Christ, and in conscious dependence on
the work of the Holy Spirit, we practice both the baptism of infants and believer baptism.
The Evangelical Covenant Church embraces this freedom in Christ as a gift that preserves
personal conviction, yet guards against an individualism that disregards the centrality of the
Word of God and the mutual responsibilities and disciplines of the spiritual community”
(2005, pg. 2). In this, the physical element of water in has real connotations to Covenant
believers as a sign of faith and commitment toward God. LifeChurch.tv has further
explained its view of Baptism as symbolic, “Baptism is symbolic of the death, burial and
resurrection of Christ. Once we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, baptism is a way
for us to publicly declare our new life in Christ. It is also a step of obedience based on God’s
commands and allows us to follow the example of Jesus, who submitted himself to baptism
to ‘fulfill all righteousness’” (Beliefs, 2012).

The Evangelical Covenant Church does not hold a view on Holy Communion as a
central affirmation; instead Holy Communion falls underneath the affirmation of freedom in
Christ. Under this, members are permitted to believe whatever they want as long as they
keep it between themselves and God. It is however mentioned as a sacrament along with
baptism (2005 pg. 2). It is generally understood that within this branch of Christianity, (i.e.
Protestantism, as opposed to Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Lutheranism) the sacrament of
Holy Communion, paralleling the view of baptism, is symbolic.

As evident by the personal freedom each believer has in Christ, the view of faith can
already be determined. Since the individual, as opposed to the gathered community, is the
locus of God’s redemptive work, the emphasis falls on a personal spirituality rather than a
thorough theology. The individual holds the right to interpret as he or she wishes in certain
matters, which then guides the Christian life. “The Evangelical Covenant Church especially cherishes the dual emphasis on new birth and new life in Christ, believing that personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the foundation for our mission of evangelism and Christian nurture. Our common experience of God’s grace and love in Jesus Christ continues to sustain the Evangelical Covenant Church as an interdependent body of believers that recognizes but transcends our theological differences” (2005, pg. 2).

**Part Two: Method**

The procedures used to determine, understand, and interpret the terminology surrounding discussions concerning either church body which have already been described, are now explained. To arrive at the goals of adequately exploring the terminology and determining if a change has occurred, it is necessary that this be done using a variety of means: a longitudinal study, online ethnographic research, artifact analysis, and finally through cluster criticism.

**Longitudinal Study.**

If one of the goals of this thesis is to determine if a change in beliefs has occurred over time, and follow the church through its development from a simple local physical church with an online presence to a fully-functioning and self-proclaimed Church Online, longitudinally examining the website over time seems obvious. Recent archiving tools and databases on the internet make this a possibility. This thesis employs the use of one such database, The Internet Archive, to selectively look back over time. “The Internet Archive is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that was founded to build an Internet library. Its purposes include offering permanent access for researchers, historians, scholars, people with disabilities, and
the general public to historical collections that exist in digital format” (About the Internet Archive, About, 2012). The Internet Archive has explained its own relevance, “With a “way-back machine” - a device that displayed the Web as it looked on a given date - historians and others would literally have a window on the past” (Future Libraries, About, 2012).

The Internet Archive has archived portions of websites available from beginning in 1996. Not all dates are available for any site, and only certain portions of websites may be available for some dates. The resulting pages point to other archived pages at as close of a date as possible, according to “About the Wayback Machine” (Web, 2012). This thesis looks back specifically for references to the internet campus or Church Online, selects from the available dates, notes the date of the archive, and then compares the section to later archived pages or current pages from the LifeChurch.tv website.

As some information displayed on websites is ephemeral, as in temporary and extremely time-sensitive, looking back on only snippets of the site over time through an archived database such as the Internet Archive Way Back Machine will only complete part of the picture this thesis hopes to develop. The rest of the data for the analysis will come from current or semi-current information displayed on the LifeChurch.tv website, found through ethnographic research.

However even this method poses a problem. Since the website is merely a pointer to the physical location of the church, and not the location of the worship service – or to use LifeChurch.tv’s term, experience – it is obvious that it is not possible to examine the two churches in the exact same way through traditional ethnographic means. However because this thesis is concerned with the rhetoric and beliefs that the church advocates, it is only necessary that a form of online ethnographic research be conducted. In this form of online
ethnographic research, the location of the study will be the website which contains the information about each church. The insights gained by examining the contents of the website will be paired with textual artifacts written by members and staff of each church. The exact methods are outlined in the following section.

**Online Ethnography.**

In a survey of the social network approach to online research, Garton, Haythornthwaite, and Wellman (1999), recognized the need to expand the field beyond examining just the users. “As widespread communication via computer networks develops, analysts need to go beyond studying single users, two-person ties, and small groups to examining the computer-supported social networks (CSSNs) that flourish in areas as diverse as the workplace (e.g., Fulk & Steinfield, 1990; Wellman et al., 1996) and virtual communities (e.g., Wellman & Gulia, in press)” (pg. 75). Certainly a religious group linked through an online social network would fit this category. The social network approach is favorable for another reason. While the primary concern of social network analysts is the relation between persons and groups, what is communicated through these relations can be found through tangible–or material–media.

Social network analysts look beyond the specific attributes of individuals to consider relations and exchanges among social actors. Analysts ask about exchanges that create and sustain work and social relations. The types of resources can be many and varied; they can be tangibles, such as goods and services, or intangibles, such as influence or social support (Wellman, 1992b). In a [computer mediated communication] context, the resources are those that can be communicated to others via textual, graphical, animated, audio, or video-based media–for example, sharing
information (news or data), discussing work, giving emotional support, or providing companionship (Haythornthwaite, Wellman, & Mantei, 1995) (pg. 78).

The tangible media described here, as noted earlier when comparing each church, are all used already by LifeChurch.tv to communicate material beliefs. Examining these available resources in the context of the LifeChurch.tv website makes online ethnographic research a fairly comprehensive method for studying the beliefs which the church advocates. Online ethnographic research has become widely accepted method of research, and is useful for the purposes of this these for examining the advocated ideologies and beliefs, and also determining user reactions to those beliefs. Heidbrink and Miczek (2010) have explained why examining websites is useful: “The Web has penetrated nearly every aspect of our social and cultural life. Thus it is no wonder, that also in the domain of religion modern digital communication technology is on the advance. For the academic study of religion, looking at religious websites has therefore become a normal and within the scientific community widely accepted practice of research” (pg. 1).

The LifeChurch.tv website is particularly useful because of its high level of interactive options. As Kruger (2005) has said, “While traditional media like books, magazines, and television enable us to see only the supplier and the supplies on the religious market, the Internet – as an interactive medium – now makes it possible to be aware of the consumer’s perspective as well. By observing Internet chat rooms, guest books, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and discussion forums and discussion lists (which are normally archived) on religion-related Web sites in particular, we can observe the way religious knowledge is spread in an online community in detail” (pg. 1). Morgan (2008) has echoed the sentiment, “Without question, what people say and write is very powerful and deserving
of the most careful study” (pg. 228). As a result, the beliefs that LifeChurch.tv advocates through its various media forms, and by the people interacting on the network, can be determined by analyzing the available textual and audio/visual artifacts. Cluster criticism would seem to be an appropriate means to identify, compare, and examine key terms from these various elements. This critical approach is now briefly introduced.

**Cluster Criticism.**

Foss (2004) in *Rhetorical Criticism* has described cluster criticism and its benefit of revealing “insights into the meanings of key terms and thus a worldview that may not be known to the rhetor” (pg. 72). “In cluster criticism, the meanings that key symbols have for a rhetor are discovered by charting the symbols that cluster around those key symbols in an artifact” (pg. 71). The terms used, or the rhetorical acts, provide ways of thinking, coding, and interpreting particular situations. The terms function in two ways: 1) to provide a rubric or guide for how an audience is to act and think, and 2) as Foss has said, “to reveal the worldview…of the rhetors who created them” (pg. 71). Kenneth Burke is understood to be a developer of the basics of this approach through his discussion of terministic screens.

In his *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke (1966) has given an oddly appropriate example of how another religious institution has used a specific terminology as a “deflection of reality.”

In his seventh *Provincial Letter*, Pascal satirizes a device which the Jesuits of his day called ‘directing the intention.’ For instance, to illustrate satirically how one should ‘direct the intention,’ he used a burlesque example of this sort: Dueling was forbidden by the Church. Yet it was still a prevalent practice. Pascal satirically demonstrated how, by ‘directing the intention,’ one could both take part in a duel and not violate the
Church injunctions against it. Thus, instead of intentionally going to take part in a duel, the duelists would merely go for a walk to the place where the duel was to be held. And they would carry guns merely as a precautionary means of self-protection in case they happened to meet an armed enemy. By so ‘directing the intention,’ they could have their duel without having transgressed the Church’s thou-shalt-not’s against dueling… (pg. 45)

Burke noted that this was an excessive example for ‘directing the intention,’ as a way to “settle for less when discussing the ways in which ‘terministic screens’ direct the attention” or the reason why nomenclature directs the attention to some channels rather than others (pg. 45). The choice of terminology is very powerful when discussing religious material objects and how they are communicated and understood to others, because in return, these materials shape the understanding of the very religion. Therefore, analyzing why key terms are clustered or described in certain ways is the method of analysis that this thesis has chosen to utilize. Herring (2005) has used a similar approach, which took “as its starting point not statements about God but the context where people are engaging with God, and the religious thinking that occurs as a result of the particular characteristics of the context” (pg. 150).

The finding and clustering of key terms on LifeChurch.tv’s website is assisted by the guiding questions posed at the introduction of this thesis: First, given the virtual nature of the Internet, do the beliefs that a church advocates seem to be or become less real or phenomenal when a church predominantly employs religious practices online? Second, given the power and range of responses that individuals can have when responding to Internet content, do the beliefs that a church advocates become more ideocentric and emotional for its online users? The key terms chosen necessarily need to reflect the beliefs
of each church. As noted earlier in this chapter, the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism each have importance to LifeChurch.tv, as do the concepts of the gathered community, and faith. Accordingly these three terms—sacraments (Holy Communion and baptism can be understood as unit together with the term “sacraments”), community, and faith—serve as key terms for analysis. Along with these terms, a few additional terms have also been singled out as being important on LifeChurch.tv’s website, namely, campus, church, and church online. These three are grouped to determine the rhetoric about each particular kind of church. After these key terms are analyzed, additional artifacts have been selected as potentially important and are explained.

**Part Three: Ethics**

It is only sensible and fair that the author of this thesis should reveal his own stance, as he too writes through a terministic screen. Kenneth Burke, even as the pioneer of this method of analysis, was forced to admit a terministic screen. “We must [original emphasis] use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another” (1966, pg. 50). I am writing, coding, analyzing, and interpreting as member in another Christian church body, which has a protestant history in common with the Evangelical Covenant Church only insofar as the two bodies are not Roman Catholic. The church body of which I am a member is a confessionally Lutheran church body, which equivocates baptism and Holy Communion to be powerful and efficacious just as the Gospel itself. The Evangelical Covenant Church, as noted earlier does not hold the same beliefs, but nevertheless regards them as important. I have tried to be sensitive to the ECC’s own theology on the matter, but the differences in
theology admittedly incorporates more complex issues than would be reasonable to allow discussion for in this paper.

However Burke has further suggested that “if you want to operate, like a theologian, with a terminology that includes ‘God’ as its key term, the only sure way to do so is to put in the term, and that’s that,” and not ambiguously as Burke has claimed metaphysics does, or flatly omitting it like Darwinian terminology (pg. 46). In this spirit, I had chosen to establish my key terms already at the beginning of this thesis in the introduction as a way to deal squarely with these inherently theological ideas. With these terms guiding the research, I hope to avoid some of the complexities of religious, internet research that Heidbrink and Miczek (2010) acknowledged, “If we look at religious web content, what are we actually seeing? And how can we interpret this? May I limit my analysis to the textual components? Or should I include pictures, music etc.? Do I have to include background colour, navigation etc, in my analysis?” (pg. 1).

Conclusion.

With each church, method, and author stance thoroughly summarized, the next chapter, chapter four, deals with the actual analysis of each church. First the key terms are identified throughout the web pages of LifeChurch.tv, both current and archived, then each term is examined in context and a cluster is formed around each term.\(^{10}\) This allows for an adequate analysis to provide insight to the two questions guiding this thesis.

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\(^{10}\) Usually, cluster analysis is done in this order: 1) Finding clusters 2) Identifying which clusters are most interesting and important, as Foss (2004) has said, “Your task is now to identify which of the clusters are most interesting and significant and have the most explanatory value for your artifact” (pg. 74). Oftentimes, a critic should use frequency and intensity to discover what is significant about the artifact. In a way, I have done this; based on existing knowledge of protestant theology, and what the ECC teaches through reading the Affirmation Booklet, as well as reading different articles and blogs by ECC authors. The key terms I have selected are important to the religious body. LifeChurch.tv is a part of that body, and should necessarily have the same
Chapter 4: A Cluster Analysis of a Local Physical Church and Online Church Website

LifeChurch.tv, as has been mentioned before, represents only a portion of the Online Religious scene. That portion, however, is nonetheless important, and conducting a heuristic study of this particular church serves to enlighten the fields of Online Religious Studies and Material Religion by facilitating a textual evaluation of the rhetoric surrounding material beliefs. This chapter presents findings concerning the unique terminology surrounding these material beliefs and provides relevant answers to the two questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. To satisfy these two questions, this chapter employs online ethnography and artifact analysis to discover and code the terminology, and a method of analysis, cluster criticism, to interpret and evaluate the terminology found on the website of a local physical church and an online church.

Cluster criticism presents an ideal approach for this thesis, since the “clusters manifest in someone’s rhetoric can ‘reveal, beneath an author’s “official front,” the level at which a lie is impossible’” as Foss (2004) has quoted Burke (1966). The author, even though he may be “perfectly conscious of the act of writing, conscious of selecting a certain kind of imagery to reinforce a certain mood, etc., he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations” (Burke, 1966 in Foss, 2004, pg. 72). In the

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values on key beliefs and terms. So, I have chosen to use the key terms mentioned at the beginning to conduct my research.
context of religion and a medium such as the Internet, the authors of the Internet religious content may be certainly aware of the particular mood they are setting, but the complexities of the medium itself may cause certain ideas to recede or advance. For example, hypothetically speaking, if asked about the limitations of the medium of the Internet for religious purposes, an author could respond by writing vaguely about the limitations of the medium but write with extreme clarity and enthusiasm for its benefits. While the limitations were the item in question, and were indeed acknowledged, the true subject became the benefits. Cluster criticism, especially in the context proposed in this thesis, provides for a means to look into the worldview of the authors of the content of LifeChurch.tv, while not discrediting their honesty by assigning the cause of the worldview to the medium of the Internet. In this, we come close to what Postman (1992) called an “ideological bias” of every tool or medium, “a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another” (p. 13).

The terms that this thesis is concerned with – sacraments, community, and faith, along with the additional supplemental terms, campus, church, and church online – are found throughout the various web pages, blogs, comments, and media content of LifeChurch.tv. The following sections attempt to separate the key term usage into two major categories, ones which deal with or refer to the online church, and ones which refer to a local physical church. Of course it was expected that many times clear distinctions would not be made by the rhetor or author of the web content, and indeed most times in the rhetoric a distinction is not made. In these instances, the clusters are simply analyzed for clues in general concerning the author’s intention pertaining to the key term. The time period of the term usage is also
taken into account, the usage found via The Internet Archive and some older archived blog posts are entered into their own category. Once the key terms are identified, the procedure outlined by Foss (2004) is followed. The other terms that cluster immediately around these key terms are noted, and are then used to provide an explanation to the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis.

**Part One: Clustering of Key Terms**

As a way of entrance into charting the key terms, an example of a key term and cluster is now provided. Next, a table is provided outlining the most prevalent clustered terms along with some notable additional findings. Following the table, each cluster is expounded upon and its importance to the original thesis question is explained.

One of the key terms chosen due to its copious usage is the term *church*. Three uses of the term church appear in the “about” section of the LifeChurch.tv website:

“The church isn't a building--it's people.”

“Craig is the Senior Pastor for LifeChurch.tv and provides leadership and guidance for the church as a whole. Following a vision God gave Craig for a different kind of church, he and a handful of people launched LifeChurch.tv in 1996.”

“Bobby is passionate about exploring new ideas and finding practical ways to leverage them for the global Church” (Appendix, F. 1-4).

In these three examples, the rhetors of the LifeChurch.tv about statements (presumably the pastors, staff, and management of LifeChurch.tv) have both directly and indirectly defined church. Dominant terms surrounding *church* include a negative use of “building” and a positive use of “people.” “As a whole” can be identified as a key phrase for the reason that more than describing what the church is, it describes what the church is not.
In this instance “as a whole” explains that the *church* referred to is not just a singular disconnected unit. “Different kind” describes the church in general, and finally the term “global” is used to describe another manifestation of Church altogether. In this case a distinction is made between the universal (capital C) Church and an individual (small c) church.

The implications for these key terms are discussed more later on in this chapter, but already it can be seen that the rhetors attempt to justify the online church and some potentially unique or different practices. Combining these clusters with the clusters of all the key terms provides a glimpse into the terministic screens of the rhetors. Table 4.1, which lists and categorizes each term, follows.

**Table 4.1. Key Terms and Clusters: A Longitudinal Comparison between a Local Physical Church and an Online Church**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Term</th>
<th>Terms surrounding usage in connection with a local physical church</th>
<th>Terms surrounding usage in connection with the online church</th>
<th>Terms having no direct connection from the rhetor to either church, or connecting to both at the same time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>“planted” “community of faith” “unique” “reach their community”</td>
<td>“neighborhood” “Church Online community” “interact” “everyone…connecting there” “chat” “interaction” “engage with each other” “engage with…video content” “wide variety of people” “distant…outside the physical reach of the Church” “curious…prefer to explore their interest in spirituality” “mobile…part of our church, but looking for an option to worship together because they are traveling or displaced” “digital…prefer to experience”</td>
<td>“engage in” “like-minded” “global” “in person and online” “individually and in groups” “inside our church and around the world” “worshipping and learning with others…one of the best ways to realign yourself with God” “Biblical” “serve” “change something” “Christ changes a life…person after person…a movement of”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sacrament(s) (plus Baptism and Holy Communion)</td>
<td>“on the rise” “Baptism bash”</td>
<td>“questions to discuss” “limitations with baptism” “process of baptism”</td>
<td>“God” “important as a follower of Jesus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>“bold step of faith and join with us in all that God is doing through LifeChurch.tv”</td>
<td>“find new steps in faith and connect with others” “step of faith”</td>
<td>“faith-filled” “big thinking” “bet the farm” “risk takers”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church Online / Church / Campus</td>
<td>“Network Churches” “body of believers” “local church” “one church in multiple locations…United.LifeChurch.tv” “not another church in the area like ours” “something bigger than ourselves” “something that is…real” “where God is doing amazing things” “grown” “God working throughout the campuses” “tight focus” “support” “sharpened vision” “God has used this campus” “continues to grow”</td>
<td>“cutting-edge stuff” “thinking outside the box” “interest of productivity (sic) and effectiveness” “like any other institution has to advance” “benefit from the good parts of progress” “globally” “global audience” “online ministry” “technology developed to build and foster a community of people” “not about connecting people with content” “but…connecting people to people” “connect with the world” “connect with our church in a new way” “allows community” “allows…connection” “allows…engagement” “church experience” “a technology” “we are spiritual contributor” “we are…not spiritual consumers” “we exist for the world” “experiences” “in home” “Church Online family” “taking Church Online to the Offline world” “beyond conventional”</td>
<td>“inside our church and around the world” “isn’t a building” “it’s people” “as a whole” “global” “re-imagining” “21st century” “Christian” “all about the ‘capital C’ Church!” “local church…hope of the world” “together” “honor to sacrifice for” “His church” “reject the label mega-church” “micro-church” “mega-vision” “does not exist for us” “we are the church” “we exist for the world” “honor…His church with integrity” “partner with…local churches” “nearest location to you” “visit a campus Facebook page to start meeting people” “campus level”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“methods”
“more important than the tools or technology…is your purpose for being there”
“greater impact…than the traditional way…in a church building”
“fuel accountability”
“mobilize prayer warriors”
“motivate follower’s of Christ”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archived Usage of Terms</th>
<th>Key Term</th>
<th>Terms surrounding usage in connection with a local physical church</th>
<th>Terms surrounding usage in connection with the online church</th>
<th>Terms having no direct connection from the rhetor to either church</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>“bringing a community together”</td>
<td>“building community”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“LifeGroup…[not online]”</td>
<td>“bringing people together”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Biblical community”</td>
<td>“genuine community…on the Internet”</td>
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<td><strong>Sacrament(s)</strong> (plus Baptism and Holy Communion)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“limitation”</td>
<td>“unanswered question”</td>
<td>“very special”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Stepping out in faith”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“participation”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“sharing”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“a common union”</td>
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<td>“to participate”</td>
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<td>“common experience”</td>
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<td>“having a bond with someone”</td>
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<td>“holy union”</td>
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<td>“encourages us to look within”</td>
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<td>“encourages us to look back”</td>
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<td>“encourages us to look ahead”</td>
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<td>“God-moment”</td>
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<td>“relational”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“doing life with other Christ-followers”</td>
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<td>“[breaking bread] means much more than communion”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“demands commitment”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“to share”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“participate in common cause”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“engage in social intercourse”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“LifeGroup, Biblical community”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“personal”</td>
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<td><em>Faith</em></td>
<td><em>Church Online / Internet Campus</em></td>
<td>“shared”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“one church with multiple locations” “growth”</td>
<td>“online campus” “Internet Campus” “fully interactive campus (in Second Life)” “major event” “exponential growth” “online community” “watch webcasts” “participate in forums” “be a part of all that God is doing” “monumental initiative” “live church online” “for people around the world” “ability for genuine community” “engaging volunteer opportunities” (2007) “unique volunteer opportunities” (2008) “online LifeGroups” “mission opportunities” “revolutionary campus” (2008)</td>
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</table>

**Part Two: Findings**

**Sacraments.**

The usage of the terms relating to sacraments, baptism, and Holy Communion were intimately linked with community. In fact, while searching for uses of the term *community* in the “What’s Next Kit” page (See appendix A, figure 4.2), after being highly encouraged to visit that page immediately after a Church Online worship experience, I was directed to a particular video under “hear more” which used a biblical reference to Holy Communion as a catalyst to discuss community. This video was a message by Craig Groeschel delivered sometime between 2006 and 2007 (no specific date was given) entitled “Disciple: Breaks Bread.” This video, number four in a five-part series on “what does a disciple do?” was actually a reference to Holy Communion, and specifically the breaking of bread. During the video message, a graphic appeared displaying the definition of the Greek word *koinonia,*
which is where Craig Groeschel affirmed that the term *communion* comes from. This graphic made it possible to hear and see the rhetor’s emphasis on communion.

The Greek word that is used is Koinonia, which means ‘to share, to participate in a common cause, to engage in social intercourse (emphasis original)’…It’s doing life at such an intimate level with other believers that they become like family to you. How many are actively involved in a LifeGroup? This represents to us Biblical community (n.d., 8:00)

Intercourse is, of course, a powerful word to describe communion. However this word is only accurately understood in connection with the other words around it. Communion is *sharing, participating* in a *common cause*, and *engaging* in *social* intercourse. All of these terms emphasize the subject doing an action that would be shared among others also. In the same video message just prior to these statements, Craig Groeschel downplayed what the breaking of bread was (as Holy Communion), in favor of what the breaking of bread *means*, and more importantly, *where or how* that meaning is found for modern day disciples.

Now a lot of people think that they broke bread, they had communion together; they had Communion [Holy Communion] in their homes. And they did. But that’s not completely what the phrase ‘breaking bread’ means. It means much more than just that…I took a class in seminary on meals…and what I learned was this: the disciples met together very, very regularly and fellowshipped, doing life together, was very important to them. In fact, the meals are not like meals today…There was a relational aspect to these meals…people were doing life together. This was a high priority to them (n.d., 6:00).
Doing life together was the focus of breaking of bread, and the meaning behind the breaking of bread came from doing it with other disciples, or Christ-followers. This is important since it necessarily left out the need to be in a church to participate in Holy Communion or the breaking of bread. Instead, it directs attention to doing life together, which may or may not include Holy Communion, but must unavoidably include others. Sharing different life experiences, sharing tears, and sharing joy were objects said to be possibilities for doing life together. As a video easily accessed directly, and in fact guided to, from the Church Online experience, it deserves special consideration. By Craig’s own admission in the video, “This really reflects the heart-beat and philosophy of our church” (n.d., 5:30).

In another video message, given in 2008, which was significantly harder to find, called “Remember: Holy Communion,” Craig did highlight the objective nature of Holy Communion. “Today we are going to participate in koinonia, participate in a holy union with Christ, and as we do so we are participating with Christ and thousands and thousands of other believers for the last two thousand years who participate with the blood and with the body of Jesus” (2008, 8:00). This was the only direct reference of ever serving or participating in Holy Communion that was found on LifeChurch.tv’s current or archived pages.

Perhaps this fact is noteworthy in and of itself, for it is possible that LifeChurch.tv has chosen to not hold Holy Communion up at the crucial level that was previously thought at the beginning of this thesis. However, the way in which Holy Communion is described in this video, and the importance denoted into it would say otherwise. In this case, the few actual offerings of Holy Communion seem to increase the specialness of the experience, whereby the significance and meaning is held by and due to the group participating in it. “So
today when we celebrate the body and blood of Jesus, we say ‘next time with Christ’ and understand this: Jesus is saying this: ‘next time with you’ All of our campuses let’s pray together” (2008, 24:30).

One question does remain as to how this act was accomplished by the Church Online campus, as the closing line to the video was “all of our campuses today, your campus pastor is going to come forth today, lead you in prayer, and serve you the Lord’s Supper” (2008 28:00). While it remains open as to how, the fact that it was accomplished, and accomplished differently, reiterate the finding that the location or the means are not as important as what it means to those participating in sharing together. The difficulty of administering Holy Communion in the same way is still acknowledged by LifeChurch.tv. To be sure, one of the few references to Holy Communion apart from these messages was a question intended to admit the difficulties of a virtual church environment and probe thought and discussion. LifeChurch.tv posed this question to anyone interested in its Church Online platform page: “How will we baptize people and serve communion in an online environment?” (Appendix C, 3).

A blog post addressing limitations—or rather “unanswered questions”—of online ministry in 2009, asked the same question: “How do you baptize people and serve communion in an online environment?” Only one out of thirty-two comments directly responded to the question, however many comments instead turned to defining church and community, how the two could exist online. The one comment addressing baptism said many people who watched or participated in another online church flew in to be baptized during a particular “beach baptism” event (appendix C, 15)
It seems that LifeChurch.tv has, in a similar way, determined how to solve this particular issue. The first reference to baptism for Church Online was for what was then the Internet Campus in 2007, “To get more information about an upcoming Baptism Bash weekend, find a campus near you and then click on the link ‘Baptism’ (Appendix C, 13). “Baptism Bash” is an event still held regularly at LifeChurch.tv across all of their local physical locations.

The rhetoric surrounding baptism portrayed it as something very spiritual and more than just a symbolic event. This unites well with the existing theology of LifeChurch.tv and of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Baptism was also portrayed as very relational, and in some ways, it was cast as more relational than communion. The rhetors of LifeChurch.tv called it to be, on more than one occasion and in various ways, a public display of faith to others. It was said to be a way of telling others, a public decision, and a way of telling everyone ‘I’m a Christ-follower. As the Evangelical Covenant Church would agree that baptism is an outward declaration of an inward experience, these word choices are not too surprising. However, it does provide a glimpse as to why LifeChurch.tv invites its Church Online viewers to travel to a physical LifeChurch.tv or another Bible-believing Christian Church instead of staying at home, in front of their computer. The limitations or unanswered questions about baptism have been diminished since the focus is not on who performs the baptism or where it is performed, but simply that it is done publically. LifeChurch.tv certainly does make these impressive events public. For example, in 2011 alone, at least six Baptism Bashes were held, with another already in early 2012 according to LifeChurch.tv Facebook calendars. At the Feb 11-12, 2012 event, over 1,000 people were baptized at this “baptism celebration” according to an update via Facebook by LifeChurch.tv Edmond
Campus. At the Edmond campus the same weekend, over 5,000 attended and experienced the baptism bash according to a video posted by LifeChurchOKC on Feb 13 (Appendix C, 7).

As a public event demonstrating or telling others of one’s decision to be a Christ-follower, baptism can be termed a relational experience. This experience, while the significance was no doubt personal and inward (i.e. an inward experience or decision), was cast to be important as a shared and public experience. With both Holy Communion and baptism being characterized as important due to the shared nature, in one way or another, of each act, it is possible to see that the members or participants do have a sort of common identification with each other in a spiritual way, which was the second preliminary question of this thesis. The first question has already been answered, “To advocates of an online church, what constitutes online Holy Communion or baptism?” It would seem that similarly to Dawson’s (2000) original duality of online religion vs. religion online, the acts of either Holy Communion or baptism do not happen online at all, but in a physical context. However, the significance of either is cast as transcending the physical, and arising from the shared nature of the group, both in the local physical churches and for Church Online.

The ways in which Church Online and the local physical churches are considered a community is now discussed.

Community.

After years of experience with the online church concept, LifeChurch.tv made available its Church Online platform for other churches to use. In a section entitled “Is it for Us?”, LifeChurch.tv has chosen to describe the community that typically shows up at Church Online in four non-exclusive segments: distant, curious, mobile, and digital.
These four terms are loaded expressions, but LifeChurch.tv has explained each.

*Distant* describes “people who are outside the physical reach of the Church,” *curious* describes “people who would prefer to explore their interest in spirituality in an online context,” *mobile* refers to “people who are a part of our church, but are looking for an option to worship together because they are traveling or displaced,” and finally, *digital* describes “people who prefer to experience much of their community in an online context” (Appendix F, 19). *Distant* and *mobile*, in one sense, could be grouped together, describing people who would be likely to otherwise worship in a local physical church, but for the reasons listed, are temporarily or indefinitely unable to. In this way, Dawson’s (2000) observation that social relations or communities are grounded in pre-existing or off-line interaction would hold true (pg. 43). *Curious* and *digital* on the other hand convey the thought that people are being drawn to Church Online without pre-existing interactions. The particular interests however, are pre-existing; namely *spirituality* and *online community*.

Elsewhere on the LifeChurch.tv web pages, the *digital* demographic of people was often associated with anonymity. The *digital* participants and viewers are drawn to Church Online due to their individual pre-existing preference toward a type or a particular amount of interaction. *Curious* is similar in this regard, in that they join in community with Church Online because of their ability to pursue a pre-existing preference. Combining *curious* with the term *spirituality* is interesting to note, for the fact that spirituality is an individualized subjective experience. The phrasing used in the reference is vague, but “exploring [one’s] own interest in spirituality” suggests minimal, if any, grounding in any objective material.

All of these terms suggest a slight orientation toward an individualized experience on LifeChurch.tv Church Online for the purpose of pursuing pre-existing interests or preferences.
This observation was reinforced by other findings on the LifeChurch.tv web pages, including an urging to “engage in community” in a video called “Why is Community Important?” found on the “Community” page of the “What’s Next Kit.”

I challenge you, find a place where you can engage in Christian community…a place where you can connect consistently with others who you love and who love you. And finally I want to challenge you to be you. You have the ability to be authentic and transparent, that’s one of the greatest gifts of enjoying life with other followers of Christ (2011, 0:20).

More recent usage of terminology surrounding community leaned toward the individual to build community for him or herself based on shared or unique interests or preferences. However a slight difference was observed in archived terms.

In archived terms for the online church, terms which were readily stressed in describing community included participles bringing together and building community. Adjectives describing the Internet Campus community included genuine, deep, and Biblical. LifeChurch.tv was said to have had the tools to make community happen or to create community on the Internet.

The majority of the terms surrounding community have a connotation of creating or building. It appears that at the beginning of the Internet Campus, LifeChurch.tv set out to create a community on the Internet using the available tools, including the live chat, streaming video, blogs, and later a variety of Facebook tools. It seems these tools were used in the presupposition that Church Online could focus on creating relationships first, and could build a community through its platform. If this had been the actual direction,
essentially for many users, Church Online could have been an end user application, through which all of a user’s community needs and spiritual needs would be fulfilled.

However, in contrast with the current description of the community which typically participates in Church Online, the terminology demonstrates that Church Online does not necessarily create community but that community is essentially a by-product or result of individual interaction. The community is also to some extent interest-based. It is interest-based in that users create community due to some pre-existing interest or preference toward the spiritual. The sharing of these unique interests sustains the community, rather than the church itself or anything in the church, including the sacraments. This is not to say that sacraments, the church, or even the Bible may not be important to the individuals, but simply that Church Online reinforces the ideal that individuals use the platform for their own interests.

This is evident to an extent in the local physical churches of LifeChurch.tv as well, particularly in the form of LifeGroups, small communities within each church made up of a particular demographic of people or who share an interest. As of February 28, 2012, there were 29 LifeGroups at Church Online, 17 of which met online the others meeting in various physical locations.

Other characteristics of the churches are discussed now under general observations of the terms Church Online, church, and campus, terms representing the online church and the local physical churches.

Church/Campus/Church Online.

The broad audience that LifeChurch.tv serves through all of its campuses is described as a global community. This is done most visibly through its Church Online campus. Even
before the Internet Campus was an official campus, it was an online community according to the history of LifeChurch.tv. On the first archived version of the LifeChurch.tv website, the online service was called “Experience Life: Life Church video and audio online” in 2001. More tools were added, and in 2002 “LifeChurch.tv experienced exponential growth as people from all over the world joined our online community to watch webcasts, participate in the forums, and be a part of all that God is doing” (2004, History, Church Online). Later, in 2003, the video was moved to a section on the website called “on TV.” In 2004, a section was added called “Online Campus” though was not officially recognized as a campus until 2006:

In April [of 2006], two monumental initiatives took place: the launch of the LifeChurch.tv Internet Campus, which provided live church online for people around the world with the ability for genuine community, engaging volunteer opportunities, online LifeGroups and even mission opportunities on the Internet, and the launch of LifeChurch.tv Open … (2007, History, Church Online).

The different variations of Church Online raise the point that to LifeChurch.tv, a fully-functioning “church” needs to have some level of interaction, and tools which allow this interaction, and thus community, to be possible.

Another development or shift was seen in the way Church Online classified members. In 2006 shortly after the Internet Campus was launched, online membership classes were held for the Internet Campus. Membership at the Internet Campus was not the same as merely watching each service and participating in the chat, it was a commitment. Still, the procedure for becoming a member was perhaps atypical from most churches. No mention
was made of learning beliefs or important faith-items, but was portrayed to be a fun experience. A 2006 blog post of the membership class explained,

Membership Class at LifeChurch.tv is a fun and informative introduction to life at LifeChurch.tv. You'll get to hear a personal message from Senior Pastor, Craig Groeschel, and his vision for the church. You will also learn a little bit about our history as a church and see some funny old footage from years ago. (Trust us, that makes it all worth it!) You will also have the opportunity to find out more about the requirements of membership and ways to get involved at LifeChurch. (Appendix G, 33).

No reference was found to membership classes at the local physical churches. Presumably, this information was displayed at the actual location. Nevertheless, membership meant a commitment to join in with the community. Elsewhere, LifeChurch.tv has explained how it possesses the tools and means available to allow for membership:

Using a dedicated internet campus staff and brand-new internet technologies (multi-user web chat, live support software) we have incorporated the elements and ministries that are core to LifeChurch.tv, and will provide opportunities to be a part of biblical community, to serve on the campus, to commit to LifeChurch.tv membership, to participate in a life group, and on-and-on (Appendix G, 67).

Membership at Church Online seems to have been short lived, as no mention of it was found after 2007. One need not even be encouraged to become a member of Church Online, but in order to join in community, LifeChurch.tv strongly encouraged the use of LifeGroups. LifeGroups (or Life Groups in older terminology) were described as small groups meeting on the internet, and in contrast, these small groups were described as LifeGroups with no limits.
The implication here is that the LifeGroups which meet in physical locations have limits, namely, geographical bounds. Church Online LifeGroups in comparison have no geographical limits, and in fact are portrayed with having no other limits at all. As described before, each LifeGroup is catered to a specific demographic or interest group. This suggests further that the platform does not create the community, but that a community develops around a particular interest. Individuals join a particular community as they desire, and can leave and join others as they desire, as LifeChurch.tv encourages, “Keep in mind that visiting a group doesn’t mean you’re committed to it, so if the first group you try isn’t a fit, that’s fine – just give another one a try!” (Find a LifeGroup, 2012).

This observation is somewhat striking in that it creates a discrepancy between what the Internet Campus intended and what Church Online does in actuality. One of the first descriptions of the Internet Campus assumed that a function of the church is to create community. “The Internet Campus really brings a new dimension to church. It doesn’t change the purpose and function of the church, just the presentation. The Internet becomes a really cool building that can open its doors to anyone around the world and have them participate at one time together” (Appendix G, 61). As community was often equivocated with Church Online, participating in Church Online meant engaging in community, thus a community would form around the church. A description of the new Church Online Platform has described the platform as “basically the technology that allows other ministries to take their content, their teaching, their worship, and put that in there in a way that allows community, connection, and engagement. Basically it’s church experience that happens online” (Appendix G, 5). The rhetoric of LifeGroups and the encouragement to join LifeGroups, along with other descriptions suggest a difference in quality of community
between Church Online and a LifeGroup to the point where the LifeGroups seem to be the ultimate goal in community, rather than Church Online.

The discourse surrounding church implies over and over again that church is about people rather than any physical building, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.

Many times, Church Online is associated with connecting. Church Online allows the leaders to “connect with the world”, and to “connect with our church in a new way.” Moreover, Church Online was portrayed as being “not about connecting people with content but…connecting people to people” (Appendix G, 5). In this way, not only is the building downplayed, but also the content. The people have become the focus of LifeChurch.tv, which is further evident by phrases such as, “we are spiritual contributor…we are…not spiritual consumers” (Appendix F, 9). The spirituality is, in effect, created by the people rather than being drawn from anything external or material.

All of these observations have implications on what faith is to LifeChurch.tv. Faith and the terms surrounding it are now discussed, and then applied to the sum of the observations.

Faith.

Surprisingly, very few uses of the term faith were found either on the current sites and pages or in archived areas. The word appeared only five times in all of the pages examined. Each time it occurred however, faith was a personal or collective item, something that the personal or the collective group processed rather than an external object. The collective sense of faith echoes the sentiment of Hipps (2005) discussed in chapter two in regards to the position of meaning and truth to an emergent church. For an emergent

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11 The duplicate references in different places were not included in this count, along with references to other churches and groups as were discussed in the LifeChurch.tv blog.
church worship service, in Hipps’ words, “experiential participation is the main emphasis in such a gathering” (2005, pg. 146). In this, the collective experience, rather than material objects such as a sacrament, holds the meaning and is the basis for Biblical community or Biblical fellowship.

But when faith was mentioned specifically for Church Online, in context it referred to a sort of personal journey, or “find[ing] new steps in faith” (Appendix E, 3). When faith referred to specifically a local church, it was the collective journey of the whole church, “five of our existing campuses began with churches who were willing to take a bold step of faith and join with us in all that God is doing through LifeChurch.tv” (Appendix E, 4). While it may be a coincidence considering the low number of references to faith, the observations concerning LifeGroups seem to back up the idea that the concept of faith to Church Online must necessarily be more individualistic rather than collective, while at there is at the same time a constant urging to join the group through LifeGroups or at a physical location.

In the “Disciple: Breaks Bread” video message, Craig Groeschel, as was noted earlier, emphasized that the meaning for communion is found in participation and sharing with others. The dichotomy between an individual faith and a collective faith is even outlined in the message.

“Christians (emphasis mine) have a personal (emphasis original) relation with Jesus. It has to be personal, no one else can have this relationship for you…but a relationship with Jesus was never intended to be private. It has to be personal, but was never intended to be private” (n.d., 11:30).

“So many people say it’s just God and me, I don’t need a church, I don’t need other people…Disciples (emphasis mine) enjoy a shared (emphasis original) relationship
with Jesus…Those who are experiencing His power…with other Christ-followers” (n.d., 12:20).

Creating disciples was indeed an emphasis for LifeChurch.tv. In fact, LifeChurch.tv’s mission, which appeared on the majority of the pages and in the various media examined, is “to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Christ.” One of the ways LifeChurch.tv attempts to do this is to engage Church Online participants in a community. For instance, after watching the experience for Church Online, a viewer or participant is very strongly encouraged to click a number of buttons, one being an “I raise my hand to Jesus” button and another a “What’s Next? Kit” button. Clicking on this link sends the participant to the “what’s next kit” page, where one can learn more about community, prayer, the Bible, baptism, and find additional resources. Under the community tab, two of this thesis’s key terms are found.

God values relationships. He wants you to be part of a community where people support and encourage you. The Bible shows us that Adam, the first man God created, experienced loneliness even though he was with God. Your faith has to be more than just between you and God. It needs to be lived out in the support, fellowship, and encouragement found in community with others (emphasis mine) (Appendix D, 11).

As was noted early on in this thesis about faith, examining ideas of where meaning and truth come from makes it possible to determine the point of reference for faith; whether or not faith has shifted from between being entirely exterior and material, individual, or collective in origins. With the examples listed so far, it seems clear that Church Online promotes anything but a material-centered faith, but instead promotes an individual orientation toward faith, while LifeChurch.tv as a whole emphasizes a collective experience, calling the
individual to join in community to become a fully-devoted disciple. Faith then is centered around the individual and collective rather than on an object.

Fascinatingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, a preview of another Online Religion analysis which is to be published after the writing of this thesis, *New Media, Wikifaith and Church Brandversation: A Media Ecology Perspective*, confirms that this particular conception of faith is indeed a modern occurrence and subject of investigation. It is what the authors Musa and Ahmadu (2012) have termed “wikifaith,” a “people-centered, people-cultivated faith” which may have implications for “church doctrine, identity, community, and governance” (Musa & Ahmadu in Gelfgren, et al., 2012, pg. 64).

**Conclusion.**

Through the rhetoric specifically surrounding the term *church* and *Church Online*, it is clear how the focus is on people. With the terminology surrounding *sacraments*, it has been observed that the difficulties of enacting and participating in the sacraments in an online context are minimized by elevating the meaning to the collective group and highlighting the shared aspect of the two sacraments. *Faith* to LifeChurch.tv has been observed to be individualistic with an urging toward the collective. The implications here are critical to future manifestations of churches in an online context as well as current religious groups interacting online. Chapter five now discusses the implications for these findings as well as limitations, suggestions for future research, and overall conclusions.
Chapter 5: Major Findings, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

This chapter lists the major findings; the problems associated with this unique method of study; practical implications; suggestions for future research; and finally offers summative conclusions.

Part One: Major Findings

This study has used materials traditionally understood to be physical and phenomenal as the crux of the research. While not looking specifically at the materials directly, but instead at the terminology surrounding, the reactions toward, and the uses of these traditionally understood materials, this thesis has tried to determine if losing the material and phenomenal sense of these objects has some implication on how the religious beliefs are understood and conveyed.

To determine this, a few preliminary questions were asked: 1) To advocates of an Online Church, what constitutes online Holy Communion or baptism? 2) In what sense do the members have a common identification, or communion, with each other? 3) Does the experience itself become a sign or object of faith?

In answer to the first question, it is clear that Holy Communion and baptism to the particular churches studied, Church Online and the LifeChurch.tv physical campuses, are literally physical and phenomenal events. Baptism, especially illustrated in the “Baptism Bash” events, was an exciting public occasion, normally happening at the physical campuses.
The more public the event, the better; thus, baptism by necessity was a phenomenal event, but portrayed to hold its meaning and importance by virtue of its being relational. In one video message found in the Church Online archives, Holy Communion with the bread and wine, body and blood, was portrayed to be something special precisely because of its relational nature as well, or being shared with other Christ-followers – even those separated by time and geography. The present location of any participant was not as crucial as the fact of sharing it. In a similar vein, *doing life together* and *sharing life* became the focus of another video referencing Holy Communion.

The relational foci of baptism and Holy Communion also seemed to urge the creation of community, and in that sense, the members had a common identification and communion with each other, which was this thesis’ second question. As to the third preliminary question, it is certainly evident that the experience of sharing the sacraments with others was portrayed to be just as meaningful as the objects themselves. For instance, LifeGroups, small communities based on interests or demographics, were strongly encouraged. In these groups, participants could *break bread together* and in doing so, they would be *doing life together*.

Two general overarching questions were also asked: 1) Given the virtual nature of the Internet, do the beliefs that a church advocates seem to be or become less real or phenomenal when a church predominantly employs religious practices online; and, 2) Given the power and range of responses that individuals can have when responding to Internet content, do the beliefs that a church advocates become more ideocentric and emotional for its online users?

The answer to the first question is admittedly a difficult question to ascertain. On the one hand, the sheer growth of Church Online through the years would give evidence that the beliefs advocated are no less real to its participants. It is understood that using the
measurement of growth to verify anything related to religion is often problematic. Yet as this question is not a testament to how true or efficacious the beliefs are, but how real they seem, growth provides an adequate answer to part of the question. Phenomenally, the rhetoric surrounding the material beliefs suggested a more subjective spiritual and less grounded or objective emphasis in regards to sacraments and community. As was noted early on in this thesis, community for emergent churches has been recently built upon some sort of experiential participation, rather than around objective materials. This was still the case for LifeChurch.tv including Church Online; though in more than one instance it was in the form of an urging, rather than a statement of actuality.

Hipps (2005) has called this a radical theology of community for many emergent churches, by which faith is known by participating in the collective community:

This marks a shift away from small group ministries as little more than tools designed to aid and support our private faith. Instead, as we shall see, some churches are developing a more radical theology of community in which we exist for the community and the life of faith cannot be known apart from the gathered people of God. Community comes from deliberately choosing to live near one another rather than developing from a structured meeting with a set curriculum. Faith is still personal, but no longer private (pg. 108).

This was echoed nearly verbatim in the “Disciple: Breaks Bread” video message: “…a relationship with Jesus was never intended to be private. It has to be personal, but was never intended to be private” (n.d., 11:30). For Church Online in particular then, community was made to be two things. Community with the fellow LifeChurch.tv participants and community with whomever one does life with, breaks bread with, and shares faith with. Not
all of these goals could be accomplished through the live chat and other interactive tools of Church Online. These interactive tools could be used as means to an end, but not to accomplish these goals by themselves.

While much rhetoric surrounding each term examined in this thesis presented an urging toward a shared and intimate community, the rhetoric proved that a true shared and intimate community is not the case in actuality for Church Online. This sense of community which was urged by LifeChurch.tv was connected to faith, by which members were more fully disciples, once they were in community with others. To a certain degree, this is an epistemic realization of faith, where individual members recognize a stronger identity as a people or person of God when this sentiment is shared with others. But at the same time, the connection of community which Church Online members shared was not in full, as especially illustrated by urging to join in LifeGroups, “break bread together”, and travel to a Baptism Bash.

These findings were found only for heuristic value, and different possibilities could exist. Given the unique methods involved in this study – using materials as the focal point for the research and using the Internet Archive as a means to look back on the church body’s response to these materials over time – it necessarily involves some limitations.

Part Two: Limitations

A first limitation was the limited longitudinal range of the study. This study was limited from 2001 to 2012, and only limited fragments of information were available from those early years. A longer range would have been useful in determining if there was a greater change over time than was actually observed. The time period from late 2001 to early 2002 was also the time when LifeChurch.tv began posting video messages online, and
when it referred for the first time to an “Online Community.” So in effect, it was impossible to search for data relating to LifeChurch.tv before some sort of Internet church or online video began, even though the official launch of the Internet campus was not until 2006.

A further limitation involving the archived pages dealt with the back-end design of the LifeChurch.tv website. From a period between mid 2005 to early 2007, the LifeChurch.tv website was Flash-based, and, for the most part, was unavailable to mine through the Internet Archive. This potentially was a cause of missing out on a lot of crucial data, considering it was right in the middle of this time period when the Internet Campus went live. While blogs were still archived during this time and much information was gained through these blogs, it is possible that the main website would have held more clues.

Because of the interconnectedness of Church Online with the rest of LifeChurch.tv campuses, little differentiation was made between the churches much of the time. Apart from blog posts, each church was discussed on the website nearly identically. LifeChurch.tv, it appeared, goes to great lengths to brand itself and maintain a predetermined image among all of its properties. With such a focus on branding, even the blog posts themselves were saturated with rhetoric stemming from the brand identity, rather than focusing on the unique church values and personalities. This is a possible reason that less dialogue was found on the key terms relating to this thesis than originally though there might be, considering the existing theology of the Evangelical Covenant Church. This trait of LifeChurch.tv necessarily limited the differences that would appear between Church Online and any of the other local physical churches. Though this does not rule out the possibility of there being such differences, it has barred the ability to locate the differences using the online ethnographic means that were employed in this thesis.
Additionally, a limitation possibly exists in the chosen source of the statements and rhetoric examined. This thesis examined primarily statements made by LifeChurch.tv, leaders of LifeChurch.tv throughout the website, and regular members and visitors in blog comments. Since this thesis was concerned initially with the beliefs advocated by the church, no effort was made in examining the dialogue which took place during each worship experience in the live chat. However, understanding now the great level of branding that LifeChurch.tv undertakes, an examination of the rhetoric in the live chats could have proven enlightening. Especially informative would have been investigative if indeed the beliefs advocated by LifeChurch.tv through the materials were even held by or important to the majority of the participants.

Part Three: Implications

The findings of this study

Churches will need to be aware that remediating church experiences or services to an online context may have further implications than simple differences in the amount of interpersonal communication, church leadership styles, or membership status. Holding or having church online may cause a shift in the fundamental understanding of faith and understandings of how and through what a religious group is united. If, as it has been shown that Emergent churches look to the collective experience as an aspect of faith, online churches could shift it to a more individual experience with an urging toward the collective. For other church bodies with a more ontological reality for faith, the consequences here could be profound. This is perhaps an area worth future research; other suggestions are now given.
Part Four: Suggestions for Future Research

In order to further study and prove the implications of material beliefs being remediated, in sense, in an online church, some possible future explorations would be helpful. First, for a study to go beyond the narrow scope of one church—and therefore one source of data—like this thesis was concerned with, a survey could be undertaken of many different online churches from a wide range of denominations, affiliations, and existing theologies. This would serve to confirm more firmly a change in beliefs as a church is remediated online. As different types of churches are surveyed, it would also be enlightening to survey the reactions of participants as well as the rhetoric of the churches. Increasing the pool of responses and rhetoric studied would increase the pool of data, but would accomplish another goal as well. Since a change in beliefs may or may not happen uniformly across the church participants and leaders, this would possibly demonstrate what change is occurring where.

Second, in order to compensate for missing information through archived resources it might be helpful to conduct interviews of church members and leaders and ask questions regarding perceived changes over time.

Third, it may also be worth considering that the differences between online and local physical churches are matters of preferred personal communication style (e.g., the interpersonal or the individual) or even a matter of what faith itself it understood to be (e.g., a personal involvement with God or a sense of social relationships with others). Subsequent explorations could be designed to explicitly determine if such distinctions make a difference when evaluating online and local physical churches.

Finally, many of the beliefs that were advocated, apart from those about the sacraments, community, and faith, were short taglines repeated over and over again. Phrases
such as “To lead people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ”, “Whoever finds God, finds Life”, “The church isn’t a building, it’s people” and even the LifeChurch.tv logo itself were plainly obvious when searching for rhetoric surrounding these religious materials. Using these short phrases raises questions about to what extent they played into shaping the beliefs and religious practices of LifeChurch.tv, both online and in the local physical churches. Studying the sociological effects of this religious branding system and its connectedness or disconnectedness with beliefs advocated through religious materials is an area for possible future research.

**Conclusion.**

This thesis has attempted to shed light on two broad questions. 1) Given the virtual nature of the Internet, do the beliefs that a church advocates seem to be or become less real or phenomenal when a church predominantly employs religious practices online; and, 2) Given the power and range of responses that individuals can have when responding to Internet content, do the beliefs that a church advocates become more ideocentric and emotional for its online users? Although this thesis was written for heuristic value, a few significant observations are nonetheless offered.

Participating in sacramental experiences online meant physically enacting them, perhaps even traveling to partake in baptism, for instance. These events were relational, serving to link each other through doing life together. An urging toward sharing with and joining in a LifeGroup community was found, which is contrasted with the existing Church Online community. Individual participants choose what LifeGroups to be a part of based on demographics of interests. Phenomenally, the rhetoric surrounding the material beliefs suggested a more subjective spiritual and less grounded or objective emphasis in regards to
sacraments and community through a sort of experiential participation, which was similar all across LifeChurch.tv. For Church Online however, this experiential participation was in the form of an urging, rather than a statement of actuality. Church Online also seemed to be orientated slightly toward the individualistic and ideocentric because of this.

This study has served as a starting point for research on material beliefs in an online church; more research in the future will give additional insight to how beliefs are remediated from a local physical church to an online church. It would seem that using this study as a starting point, a powerful and significant research agenda for studying beliefs in an online context could be developed.
References


(Original work published 1992)


Steamingchurch.tv Retrieved October 19, 2011 from www.streamingchurch.tv


Appendix A: Current Church Webpage Screen Shots

Figure 3.1
Church Online Page

![Church Online Page](image1)

Figure 3.2
Live Church Online

![Live Church Online](image2)
Figure 3.3
Oklahoma City Church Page

Figure 4.2

Congratulations on your decision to surrender your life to Jesus.

Congratulations! We're thrilled that you have taken the step of faith to believe in Jesus and trust your life to Him. You probably have some questions about what this means and where to go from here. That’s why this site is all about taking the next steps for your journey with Christ. On each page, you’ll find a helpful message, a place to connect with us, and resources to help you take your next steps in following Jesus. Our goal is to help you grow in your relationship with Christ and embrace God’s purpose for your life.

More areas for you to engage and explore:
- Community
- Holy Bible
- Prayer
- Baptism
Appendix B: Archived Church Webpage Screen Shots

August 2001 Online Video Page

July 2003 LifeChurch.tv Home Page (displaying the “Online Campus”)
Appendix C. Key Term: Sacraments (Baptism & Holy Communion)

1. “Get Baptized. Baptism is our way of telling the world about our relationship with Christ. Jesus did it, and it’s an important way we can follow His footsteps.”

2. “Since that time, salvations and baptisms have been on the rise, and attendance has increased by 66%. Mayer said the tight focus and support offered to them as a campus of LifeChurch.tv has provided a sharpened vision with the team leadership to make it happen. ‘There is not another church in the area like ours.’”

3. “Questions to discuss before your team launches a church online
   Are our leaders excited by the potential for online ministry?
   Are we prepared with a team who can minister to the people who engage with our online ministry?
   Do we understand that online ministry will look different than ministry at our physical location? Are we prepared to adapt or offer alternate processes, programs, and ministries?
   How will we baptize people and serve communion in an online environment?
   How will we help people who prefer to remain anonymous and avoid the kinds of relationships where accountability can occur?
   How will we meet the physical needs of our people, like hospital visits?”

4. “Baptism Bash” on Feb 11-12 at all local, physical LifeChurch.tv locations.

5. “Baptism is a public decision. It’s telling…everyone that I’m a Christ-follower” “Jesus commanded it…it’s not an option, but an obligation.” “Baptism is very, very spiritual. When we are obedient to what God’s word tells us to do, there is something that happens to us that we can’t understand with our minds, something that we can’t explain with our words, something spiritual that takes place, and baptism is a spiritual experience that God commands us to do. Your life will be impacted and never the same when you get baptized…on this page are some resources, and one of them is how you can be baptized.”

6. “Get Baptized
To help you in the process of getting baptized we’ve listed some local churches and baptism partners for you to connect with. You can contact these locations as they are near enough for you to travel to and they have said they are willing to walk through the process of baptism with you.

LifeChurch.tv
LifeChurch.tv is a Bible believing Christian church with several locations in the United States. Click below to get a listing of their locations and contact information:
Click for LifeChurch.tv Locations

12 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/next-steps
13 http://united.lifechurch.tv/stories.html
14 http://churchonlineplatform.com/is-it-for-us/
15 http://whatsnextkit.tv/baptism/
Network Churches
Network Churches are a group of over one hundred churches in partnership with LifeChurch.tv located in various communities around the world. Click below to get a listing of their locations and contact information:

Click for Network Church Locations

Bible Believing Church
If you can’t find a LifeChurch.tv or Network Church location near enough for you to get baptized at they you might try locating a Bible believing Christian church near you.”16

7. LifeChurch.tv Edmond Campus
   “...Edmonton Campus is on flippin’ fire right now. So this weekend, the Edmond campus busted 5000 people; 5000 people! Tons of baptisms, tons of changed lives....”
   Feb 13, 201217

8. “LifeChurch.tv Edmond Campus
   http://youtu.be/kIPvKwDmqcs
   Last week at LifeChurch.tv locations, we had the honor to baptize more than 1000 people who were celebrating and proclaiming their new life in Christ! This video says it all!”
   February 17 at 2:30pm

9. LifeChurch.tv - OKC Campus
   The pool is ready to baptize over 150 people this weekend. Celebrate all the amazing stories of changed lives with us @ every experience!
   Like · Share · February 11 at 4:05pm via HootSuite
   34 people like this.

   [name omitted] am getting baptized here today am glad and blessed of the Lord for this is special day for me.
   February 11 at 4:10pm · Like · _1

   [name omitted] I LOVE, LOVE, LOVE baptisms! I cry like a baby everytime someone comes out of the water with that big smile!!! Congrats to all who are being baptized.
   February 11 at 4:17pm · Like

   LifeChurch.tv - OKC Campus It's going ti be awesome!
   February 11 at 4:19pm · Like

11. “Q. There seems to be several forms of baptism used in churches. (sprinkling, pouring, immersion, etc.) Which one is right?
   A. Sincere followers of Christ differ on the style of baptism. At LifeChurch.tv we prefer immersion because it is a great picture of burying the old life. It reflects the symbolism of being buried with Christ in Romans 6:3-4.”18

16 http://whatsnextkit.tv/baptism/getbaptized/
17 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IEzNz3tX38&feature=youtu.be
“Jesus commanded us to celebrate our new life through public baptism. At LifeChurch.tv, that’s what Baptism Bash is all about…celebrating your new life through Jesus.”

12. **“What is Baptism?”**

**A Step of Obedience**

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." - Matthew 3:13-16

Even Jesus submitted to baptism to "fulfill all righteousness" or do everything that is right.

**A Symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ**

"do not you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." Romans 6:3-11

Just as Christ gave His life for us and died, we have also given our lives, and our old self, the person we were before we met Christ, is dead. Just as Christ was resurrected from death, we too come out of the symbolic grave of baptism and are raised to become a new person.

**A Statement of Commitment**

"if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Romans 10:9-10

When we confess with our mouth that we believe and trust in Christ we make a statement of faith. Baptism is also a public statement that we have surrendered our lives to Christ and we believe in Him. It is similar to a marriage ceremony. You can tell someone you love them and want them to be your partner for life but a marriage ceremony makes a public statement of what is already in your heart.

"If anyone publicly acknowledges me here on earth, I will openly acknowledge that person before my Father in heaven." Matthew 10:32-33

In summary, baptism is a necessary step of obedience for every follower of Christ. It symbolizes what has happened in our hearts as we give our lives to Christ just as He gave his life for us. After Christ gave His life He was buried and then later raised from the dead as a new person. We too are symbolically buried in a grave of water and come out of the water a new person. We are declaring to the world that we belong to Christ and He is our Lord and Savior.”

13. **“Baptism is...”**

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A step of obedience (Matthew 3:13-16) – Jesus set the example for us by being baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

A statement of commitment (Romans 10:9-10) – Baptism serves as a public statement that we have surrendered our lives to Christ and that we believe in him. In baptism, we are declaring to the world that we belong to Christ and He is our Lord and Savior.

A symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-11) - Just as Christ gave His life for us and died, in making a decision to follow Christ, the person we were prior to becoming a follower of Christ is also dead. Modeling how Christ was buried and then resurrected from death, when being baptized we are buried in the water and then raised to become a new person.

To get more information about an upcoming Baptism Bash weekend, find a campus near you and then click on the link "Baptism". 

14. “Yesterday we had a great discussion about the advantages of online ministry. Thanks for all your thoughtful feedback! Today we’ll discuss some of the limitations—or unanswered questions—of online ministry. Here are some examples:

   How do you baptize people and serve communion in an online environment?”


   To address some the questions posed in THIS blog post.

   At my Former Church (flamingroadchurch.com) Baptism online happened all the time. How? Some people Got Baptism at home, Via Ichat in their Bath tub, it was incredible to experience. Other times People actually FLEW in to be a part of our Beach Baptism…People Paid plane tickets to be a part of OUR Beach Baptism. Talk about stepping out in faith!!


   “Baptism is a very spiritual thing. Something more spiritual than you’ve ever seen before.”


   “You may go to different churches and hear different things…each one will have their own flair on it…you may go to a Lutheran church and hear something different, you may go to a Catholic church and hear something different. Speaking of Catholics and Baptism. Anyone know how you make holy water? You put water in a pot, put it on the stove, turn it up way high and you boil the hell out of it…” 2:00

   “Instead of looking at different church teachings today, let’s try to stick as closely as we can to scripture.” 2:45 “Repent and be baptized”

22 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2009/08/12/church-online-limitations/
23 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2009/08/12/church-online-limitations/
24 http://www.lifechurch.tv/watch/remember/1
“Don’t let anyone ever tell you that baptism is just a symbolic event. Watch as the Holy Spirit after Jesus had fasted forty days lands on Him and God the father said, ‘that’s my boy’…at that moment the public ministry of Jesus is launched.” 5:15
“Next weekend, hundreds and hundreds, maybe even thousands of you, will be baptized, and I want to help you understand the spiritual power behind you being baptized. You’re not just getting wet, I want you to understand what it is that God wants to do in and through your obedience in you getting baptized.” 7:00
“Three things: next weekend as you are getting baptized, you will be publically standing with Christ” (Outward declaration of inward thing). 7:30
“You are passionate about Christ and his ministry for your life, you are clothed with Christ.” 8:15
“Jesus was baptized in the most public place imaginable. So next weekend when you are baptized, I want you to invite everyone that you know.” 10:15
“Second thing is when you are baptized, you are baptized into Christ’s death.” 12:30
“Third you are raised into new life.” 16:30
“Many of you are saying, ‘I’d love to have this new life, but I don’t know how to get there.’” 25:00


“Jesus did something very special to help us remember what it is that Jesus did for us” 4:30
“Communion comes from the Greek word, koinonia. It means participation or sharing. Very literally it means communion, a common union. To participate with. Participating with Jesus by faith. We participate with him in his death, in his burial, and his resurrection. It is a common experience.” (You went to burp and you threw up in your mouth) 7:00. “Common experience.” (Like being scared of the beach after seeing Jaws). “Common experience” (breaking son’s femur or arm) “Having a bond with someone” (cancer, lost a child, or good experiences, etc.)
“Today we are going to participate in koinonia, participate in a holy union with Christ, and as we do so we are participating with Christ and thousands and thousands of other believers for the last two thousand years who participate with the blood and with the body of Jesus.” 8:00
“The Lord’s Supper 1) Encourages us to look within” 9:15 Bad spiritual attitude
“The Lord’s Supper 2 Encourages us to look back” 15:30 “When you know the context behind it, it brings deep, deep meaning.” 17:00
“The question for you to wrestle with today is this, what God-memory is most special to you?...For some of you it is the moment when God forgot your sin…others would say when I prayed and God did something only God could do” 20:00 “Others would say, ‘I have no God-moment,’ but today, when you surrender your lives completely to Him and maybe receive the Lord’s Supper today for the first time as a follower, someone who is devoted to Jesus, maybe for the first time this may be your God-moment…” 21:00
“The Lord’s Supper teaches us to 3) look ahead”
“The question I ask you is this, ‘what are you looking forward to with God?’” 23:00

25 http://www.lifechurch.tv/watch/remember/3
“So today when we celebrate the body and blood of Jesus, we say ‘next time with Christ’ and understand this: Jesus is saying this: ‘next time with you’ All of our campuses let’s pray together.” 24:30
“All of our campuses today, your campus pastor is going to come forth today, lead you in prayer, and serve you the Lord’s Supper.” 28:00


“It’s all relational…A Christ-follower breaks bread, doing life with other Christ-followers” 5:00
“This really reflects the heart-beat and philosophy of our church” 5:30
“Now a lot of people think that they broke break, they had communion together, they had Communion [Holy Communion] in their homes. And they did. But that’s not completely what the phrase ‘breaking bread’ means. It means much more than just that. …I took a class in seminary on meals…and what I learned was this: the disciples met together very, very regularly and fellowshipped, doing life together, was very important to them. In fact the meals are not like meals today.” 6:00
“There was a relational aspect to these meals…people were doing life together. This was a high priority to them.
Two key thoughts: 1) Breaking break demands extreme commitment… ‘They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, and the breaking of bread.” 6:30
“The Greek word that is used is Koinonia, which means to share, to participate in a common cause, to engage in social intercourse” 8:00 “It’s doing life at such an intimate level with other believers that they become like family to you. How many are actively involved in a LifeGroup? This represents to us Biblical community. These people in our LifeGroup are like family to us.” 9:00 “We break bread together. This isn’t accidental. This is Biblical community.” 10:30 “How can some people say ‘I’m too busy for what Jesus said was most important?’” 11:00
“Christians (emphasis mine) have a personal relation with Jesus. It has to be personal, no one else can have this relationship for you…but a relationship with Jesus was never intended to be private. It has to be personal, but was never intended to be private” 11:30
“So many people say it’s just God and me, I don’t need a church, I don’t need other people…”Disciples (emphasis mine) enjoy a shared relationship with Jesus…Those who are experiencing His power…with other Christ-followers.” 12:20

26 http://www.lifechurch.tv/watch/remember/1
27 http://www.lifechurch.tv/watch/disciple/4
Appendix D. Key Term: Community.

1. “We’re serving a global community...in person and online, individually and in groups, inside our church and around the world.”

2. “He also leads our small groups and missions teams as we redefine what ministry and personal development look like in a global community.”

3. “Attend church regularly. Worshiping and learning in community with others is one of the best ways to re-align yourself with God.”

4. “Serve. Make a difference by serving a worthy cause, whether volunteering at LifeChurch.tv or changing something in your community.”

5. “When Christ changes a life dramatically, people take note. And when it happens to person after person in a community, a movement of God takes place. Spaces & Places provides fertile ground for this kind of growth: new locations, new experiences, new facilities... new life.”

6. “If you are new in your relationship with Jesus and wondering what the next steps are, why community is important as a follower of Jesus and what is so important about the Bible; then we’d encourage you to check out http://whatsnextkit.tv. With short personal messages, resources and opportunities to learn more WhatsNextKit.tv can help you take the next steps as you start this journey following Jesus Christ.”

7. “The Church Online blog is moving to a new neighborhood! The blog – and all the wonderful content and community we have here – transitions into the LifeChurch.tv Facebook page on Thursday, August 19th. Facebook is a great place to interact with the staff, blog writers and other people in the Church Online community, and we are excited that everyone will be connecting there from now on!”

8. “If, as Bill Hybels has stated, the local church is the hope of the world, I think it’s crucial this syndrome be cured. To be truly planted in a community of faith, we need to put the “just” mentality to death.

I offer here two suggestions for church staffers to consider, as well as two ideas for non-paid church leaders.”

9. “Chat

28 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/about
29 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/about
30 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/next-steps
31 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/next-steps
32 http://www.lifechurch.tv/causes/overview
34 http://internet.lifechurch.tv/2010/page/2/
Interaction with your community.

Your team and guests interact through a live chat during each experience. Chat allows your community to engage with each other and with the video content as they experience it. Chat can enhance the online experience: a warm welcome, friendly chatter, answers to questions, response to the worship, reactions to the teaching, and celebration for those who give their lives to Christ. Guests who prefer to not participate in chat can watch the video full-screen or click a tab that shows them alternate content (like message notes)."36

10. “Who connects with Church Online?
A wide variety of people show up at Church Online, and typically the community there could be described in four segments:

- Distant: people who are outside the physical reach of the Church
- Curious: people who would prefer to explore their interest in spirituality in an online context
- Mobile: people who are a part of our church, but are looking for an option to worship together because they are traveling or displaced
- Digital: people who prefer to experience much of their community in an online context”37

11. “God values relationships. He wants you to be part of a community where people support and encourage you. The Bible shows us that Adam, the first man God created, experienced loneliness even though he was with God. Your faith has to be more than just between you and God. It needs to be lived out in the support, fellowship, and encouragement found in community with others.” 38

12. “God created us…with the purpose and intention of having relationships, of having community. He created us to share our lives deeply with each other…now all of us have community in one way or another already, we have friends, people we spend social time with…what makes a Christian community different than what we already have?…love…and consistency…I challenge you, find a place where you can engage in Christian community…a place where you can connect consistently with others who you love and who love you. And finally I want to challenge you to be you. You have the ability to be authentic and transparent, that’s one of the greatest gifts of enjoying life with other followers of Christ. We’ve listed some ideas and resources to help you take the next steps in engaging in community, where it be here online or at your local church”39 (0:20).

13. “Find Community
To help you in the process of finding community we’ve listed some local churches and community partners for you to connect with. These partners have options from online communities and groups to join to local churches and support groups.

LifeChurch.tv

36 http://churchonlineplatform.com/tour/
37 http://churchonlineplatform.com/is-it-for-us/
38 http://whatsnextkit.tv/community/
39 http://whatsnextkit.tv/community/
LifeChurch.tv is a Bible believing Christian church with several locations in the United States. Click below to get a listing of their locations and contact information:

[Click for LifeChurch.tv Locations]

**Church Online**

Church Online is the online community and ministry of LifeChurch.tv. We have a vibrant community in Facebook where it is safe to ask spiritual questions, find new steps in faith, and connect with others. Click the link below to take the first step in getting connected:

[Connect with Church Online Community]

**Network Churches**

Network Churches are a group of over one hundred churches in partnership with LifeChurch.tv located in various communities around the world. Click below to get a listing of their locations and contact information:

[Click for Network Church Locations]

14. “Is creating a username and password the same thing as becoming a member? If so, I am already a member, right?”
   Posted by: [name omitted] | July 25, 2006 10:51 PM

15. “Paul—we are having our first membership class on the 6th. This is not the same as registering. During membership, we will learn all about the vision and mission of Lifechurch.tv. Then you decide if you want to be a member by meeting some of the "requirements" such as attending regularly and tithing, etc. Come check out the class and then you can make up your mind. It is very informative as well. Hope to see you there!!”
   Posted by: [name omitted] | July 26, 2006 11:25 AM

16. “This is an incredible step in bringing a community together and watching God's people grow through Life Church. I can't wait!!”
   Posted by: [name omitted] | July 26, 2006 08:47 AM

17. “Building Community
    Wow, I think we all can agree that God is doing some incredible things at the Internet Campus. I am taking time this week to encourage us in steps we need to take. I have loved getting to know you all on the weekend, but that is not the only time we should be fostering Godly relationships in our lives. You need Godly relationships outside of the weekend.

    Do you have someone in your life to “do life with”? Do you have people that encourage you to follow Christ, to be a good husband according to God’s Word, to be a Godly mother, or to be a person of Biblical integrity? If not, I encourage you to seek those people and pray that


God will bring those people into your life. That is what LifeGroups are all about. Some of you need to begin a LifeGroup in your area. A LifeGroup leader does not have to be some super Bible teacher or some perfect relational leader. A LifeGroup leader is someone who loves God and wants to build real Biblical community. The good news is that LifeChurch.tv has curriculum and people in place to help coach and guide LifeGroup leaders. You are not alone. We are preparing the Webchat tool we use in the Lobby Chat to be a LifeGroup meeting place online, and I am excited about the great options we will have for meeting here at the Internet Campus. But many of you need to start a LifeGroup in your area that doesn't meet online - you will bring people together for Biblical community in your home, at a coffeeshop, or to enjoy an activity together. I want to challenge each of us at the Internet Campus to step out of our comfort zone and hear God’s call. How is God calling you to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Christ? When you answer this question and do what God is calling you to do, you in turn will become more fully devoted in your own journey with Christ.

Living life in Christ,

Brandon Donaldson
LifeChurch.tv Internet Campus Pastor

1. “We are faith-filled, big thinking, bet-the-farm risk takers. We’ll never insult God with small thinking and safe living.”

2. “Your faith has to be more than just between you and God. It needs to be lived out in the support, fellowship, and encouragement found in community with others.”

3. “Church Online is the online community and ministry of LifeChurch.tv. We have a vibrant community in Facebook where it is safe to ask spiritual questions, find new steps in faith, and connect with others. Click the link below to take the first step in getting connected:

4. **Connect with Church Online Community**

5. “In the short history of LifeChurch.tv, five of our existing campuses began with churches who were willing to take a bold step of faith and join with us in all that God is doing through LifeChurch.tv. Find out more about the stories of these churches and their United journey here.”

6. “If, as Bill Hybels has stated, the local church is the hope of the world, I think it’s crucial this syndrome be cured. To be truly planted in a community of faith, we need to put the “just” mentality to death.
I offer here two suggestions for church staffers to consider, as well as two ideas for non-paid church leaders.”

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44 [http://whatsnextkit.tv/community/](http://whatsnextkit.tv/community/)
46 [http://united.lifechurch.tv/about.html](http://united.lifechurch.tv/about.html)
Appendix F. Key Term: Church/Campus

1. “inside our church and around the world.””48

2. “The church isn't a building--it's people.””49

3. “Craig is the Senior Pastor for LifeChurch.tv and provides leadership and guidance for the church as a whole. Following a vision God gave Craig for a different kind of church, he and a handful of people launched LifeChurch.tv in 1996.””50

4. “Bobby is passionate about exploring new ideas and finding practical ways to leverage them for the global Church.””51

5. “LifeChurch.tv is a Christian church.””52

6. “We are all about the “capital C” Church! The local church is the hope of the world and we know we can accomplish infinitely more together than apart.””53

7. “We give up things we love for things we love even more. It’s an honor to sacrifice for Christ and His church.””54

8. “We wholeheartedly reject the label mega-church. We are a micro-church with a mega-vision.””55

9. “We are spiritual contributors not spiritual consumers. The church does not exist for us. We are the church and we exist for the world.””56

10. “We will honor Christ and His church with integrity. If we live with integrity, nothing else matters. If we don’t live with integrity, nothing else matters.””57

11. “We build on the strengths God has given each of us, partner with community organizations and local churches, and focus on opportunities that span the globe.””58

12. Pat, Dec. 9, 2010 at 2:10pm. “Glad to see a church doing some cutting-edge stuff and thinking outside of the box in the interest of productivity and effectiveness.””59

48 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/about
49 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/about
50 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/about
51 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/about
52 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/beliefs
58 http://www.lifechurch.tv/causes/overview
13. Eve, Dec. 10, 2010 at 10:12am. “With the progress of technology everything is possible. Church like any other institution has to advance and benefit from the good parts of progress.”

14. “Where are other Network Churches?...Each location represents a body of believers using shared resources to reach unique communities with the love of Christ”

15. “The idea for United came about when a local church approached us and expressed their interest in partnering with LifeChurch.tv. What took shape was a new concept for us: one church in multiple locations. As similar relationships evolved and we saw the incredible ways God worked through each transition, United.LifeChurch.tv was born.”

16. “LifeChurch.tv is one church with multiple locations. Choose the campus you would like to enter. Thank you for visiting us at lifechurch.tv.”

Appendix G. Key Term: Church Online

1. “We meet in 14 locations around the United States and globally online.”

2. “With over 40+ times during the week, targeting a global audience, with experiences that will work for whatever timezone you're in! Try Church Online”

3. “We’ve been looking forward to this moment for a long time. Ever since the early days of Church Online (or the Internet Campus as we called it back then), one of the most frequent questions we received was, “How can we develop something similar?”

4. Through the partnership of a handful of like-minded churches, we were able to start over from square one and develop a solution that churches everywhere could use to launch an online ministry.

5. “Hey pastors and church leaders, as many of you know our church is passionate about leveraging technology to reach this world for Christ. And one of the ways we did that started about five and a half years ago, and it’s called Church Online. It’s basically a technology that we developed to build and foster a community of people that gather together online each week to be able to see teaching, worship, but more importantly, engage and connect with

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59 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2010/12/09/online-all-staff-meeting/#comments
60 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2010/12/09/online-all-staff-meeting/#comments
61 http://network.lifechurch.tv/
62 http://united.lifechurch.tv/stories.html
64 http://www.lifechurch.tv/who-we-are/about
65 http://www.lifechurch.tv/locations/church-online
66 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2012/01/09/church-online-platform-is-live/#comments
It’s not about connecting people with content but really about connecting people to people. And what we’ve seen God do with that over the last five and a half years has been truly extraordinary. We see over 100,000 computers every single week that are connecting to one of the many different services that we have and the computers are coming from hundreds of different countries and territories from all over the world. It’s actually an amazing thing to think about, how God could use a ministry that is located in one place or 15 locations then actually go on and extend that to hundreds of thousands of places around the world. And as we’ve been doing that, we’ve learned so much, and one of the things we’ve learned is not only does it allow us to connect with the world, but its allowing us to even connect with our church in a new way: as people travel they stay connected in a new way, they’re able to connect to Church Online. And we realize that this is not something that could just be a benefit for our church or for the kingdom, but rather for churches and local churches all around the world. And in fact, it became one of the most frequently asked questions that I would receive and that our staff would receive, is there any way that with all of the content that LifeChurch shares, that you could possibly share the technology that you use with our church to use?

…And in the last year or so we’ve had about a dozen to 15 churches that have been testing this “Church Online platform” as we’ve called it, and its basically the technology that allows other ministries to take their content, their teaching, their worship, and put that in there in a way that allows community, connection, and engagement. Basically it’s church experience that happens online. We’ve been testing with those churches and we’ve learned a lot…and now we are excited that on Jan 9, we are actually going to open it up to any church that would like to use the technology so that they could have their own Church Online experience with their own content, their worship and their teaching. So this is for you, and is something that we are very excited about because we really believe that thousands upon thousands of churches around the world in many different languages could begin to leverage this technology to share the gospel with people all over the world, but not only all over the world, but actually make them stay more connected to their own church communities by leveraging technology; by leveraging the Internet and technology today. So what I want you to do if you are interested in this is to go to ChurchOnline.org…”

6. [name omitted] (Dec 6, 2011 at 11:41 am)
“1) We are faith-filled, big thinking, bet-the-farm risk takers. We’ll never insult God with small thinking and safe living.
2) We are all about the “capital C” Church! The local church is the hope of the world and we know we can accomplish infinitely more together than apart.
3) We are spiritual contributors not spiritual consumers. The church does not exist for us. We are the church and we exist for the world.”
It’s one thing to say it. It’s another to do it. Great job “doing”!!!

7. “Check Ways To Connect with Church Online!
by Tony Steward on November 30th, 2010

http://swerve.lifecurch.tv/2011/12/06/free-platform-helps-any-church-launch-an-online-ministry/
http://swerve.lifecurch.tv/2011/12/06/free-platform-helps-any-church-launch-an-online-ministry/
If you want to connect with the Church Online community you are going to want to head on over to Facebook at http://facebook.com/lifechurchtv. There we have ongoing conversations, helpful videos and a place for you connect with others.”  

8. “If you are looking for the Church Online Experiences you are in luck! We have 50 a week which means with times multiple times a day on every day of the week we have an experience time that will work for you. To connect with an experience you can go to http://live.lifechurch.tv.”

9. Live Prayer is a service available during all Church Online experiences, every day of the week. The Live Prayer chat room translates the words of those seeking prayer, and all you need to do is type out what your heart is praying on their behalf. Would you consider volunteering about an hour each week at one of our experiences? It's such a blessing!

10. “Some of you (thousands of you, in fact) have been clicking "like", "comment" or "share" a lot lately and it's making a difference! Just this week we received these two testimonies from people who attended Church Online after seeing a post from this Facebook page that was shared.”

11. “While my evangelistic approach definitely isn’t one of planning on asking people everywhere I go to come attend Church Online with me, I’ve taken many opportunities in the past 3 years to ask people to check it out. But this was the first time someone I’ve met in the secular work world beat me to the punch! Our new friend attended church with us in our home yesterday and brought his two kids to play with ours. We learned more about each other, watched the message together, and at the end of the experience he stated that he’d found a church for his family.”

12. “[name omitted] That sounds okay for the shut-ins, but I think I prefer meetings with many people, hearing the music live, etc... September 18, 2010 at 6:12pm”

13. “Recently some Church Online attendees and volunteers met up face to face to become better acquainted. They had a wonderful time learning more about each other and building their local community within our larger Church Online family.”

14. “[name omitted] Awesome! Taking Church Online to the Offline world! September 15, 2010 at 3:28pm · Like · 2”

15. “There have been some exciting things happening at Church Online lately, and I’d like to take a moment to share with you a few of the highlights.

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FORTY!
Did you know that we now have 40 online experiences every week? That means there are 40 opportunities each week for people around the world to encounter the love of God through the times of worship, the messages, and the interaction with volunteers.”

16. “These are the people it’s possible to reach right now using media and technology. In the past, you might have heard me say, “There are more people alive today than at any other point in human history, and they are more connected now than at any time in the past.” India is at the very center of that…both from a population standpoint, and in terms of being globally connected.
We have an incredible opportunity in front of us to reach this population, but we’ll need to move beyond conventional methods. That’s one of the reasons we’re so excited about India being the country with the largest attendance at Church Online. With just a few clicks, these globally connected youth can experience a message of hope and salvation from across the world.”

17. “While some of the stories we hear represent a dramatic change like the one above, there are many other cases where Church Online has made a difference in someone’s everyday life…direction for a big decision, strength to break a harmful habit, encouragement to reconcile a fractured relationship, and more.
How about you? Whether through an internet church service, podcast, or other experience, has online ministry had an impact on your life?”

18. “[name omitted], Aug. 13, 2009 at 5:56 pm.
Personally, Church online has been a great support to my wife and I as we’ve taken time to recover from burn out… we have a young daughter and trying to get to church is sometimes tough, but we appreciate that we can continue to be taught and meet with other believers online while taking the time needed to recover. Do we think this will ‘replace’ us physically ‘going’ to a church, no…but we can see the potential here to use this to minister to others in similar situations… its a great service and thank you Lifegate for making it available!”

19. “Who connects with Church Online?
A wide variety of people show up at Church Online, and typically the community there could be described in four segments:
• Distant: people who are outside the physical reach of the Church
• Curious: people who would prefer to explore their interest in spirituality in an online context
• Mobile: people who are a part of our church, but are looking for an option to worship together because they are traveling or displaced
• Digital: people who prefer to experience much of their community in an online context”

20. “Questions to discuss before your team launches a church online

78 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2010/03/18/india-urban-youth/
79 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/category/church-online/page/2/
80 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2009/08/13/why-church-online/#comments
81 http://churchonlineplatform.com/is-it-for-us/
• Are our leaders excited by the potential for online ministry?
• Are we prepared with a team who can minister to the people who engage with our online ministry?
• Do we understand that online ministry will look different than ministry at our physical location? Are we prepared to adapt or offer alternate processes, programs, and ministries?
• How will we baptize people and serve communion in an online environment?
• How will we help people who prefer to remain anonymous and avoid the kinds of relationships where accountability can occur?
• How will we meet the physical needs of our people, like hospital visits?82

21. “More important than the tools or technology you use in online church environments is your purpose for being there—connecting people to Christ and each other within a loving, supportive, and active community.”83

22. “You’re in control of your church online environment: the look and feel, the information, the settings—it’s all up to you. You’ll get a detailed guide that will walk you through the setup process.”84

23. “When a guest visits your church online website, they’ll see one of two landing pages: online or offline mode.
24. Online mode appears when your service is live or just about to start. Guests will experience your full church online environment.”85

25. “Our mission is extremely pointed, people far from God filled with life in Christ. We believe if we can give people an experience that aligns with our mission and their daily routines, we can make a greater impact than simply reaching people the traditional way...in a church building.” -Steven Furtick, Elevation Church.86

26. “Yesterday we had a great discussion about the advantages of online ministry. Thanks for all your thoughtful feedback! Today we’ll discuss some of the limitations—or unanswered questions—of online ministry. Here are some examples:
• How do you baptize people and serve communion in an online environment?”87

27. “[name omitted]. Aug. 12, 2009 at 10:44 am.
To address some the questions posed in THIS blog post.
1. At my Former Church (flamingroadchurch.com) Baptism online happened all the time. How? Some people Got Baptism at home, Via Ichat in their Bath tub, it was incredible to experience. Other times People actually FLEW in to be a part of our Beach Baptism...People Paid plane tickets to be a part of OUR Beach Baptism. Talk about stepping out in faith!!

82 http://churchonlineplatform.com/is-it-for-us/
83 http://churchonlineplatform.com/is-it-for-us/
84 http://churchonlineplatform.com/tour/
85 http://churchonlineplatform.com/tour/
86 http://churchonlineplatform.com/
87 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2009/08/12/church-online-limitations/
2. Does this Keep people anonymous? Sure, but so do Churches. It’s all Grace and environment. If a LOCAL Church makes you feel uncomfortable you’ll stay Anonymous there too…IF the ONLINE experience is warm and graceful, people “Open UP” and when that would happen we’d give them the Option to a Pastor Chat where they could have a little more Privacy about what they were speaking to.

3. Meeting Physical needs: For most Response moments we’d ask them to Click or participate with us in the moments and also GO OUT and be a part of the community, making a difference, finally if they were NEAR a CAMPUS to go be a part of that campus. If NOT, start a small group there.”

28. “[name omitted]. Aug. 12, 2009 at 1:57 pm. This past week in a connection event we had, we saw people open up and share things that were really causing them to struggle in their relationship with God. And we saw others pray for them. We even connected a missionary from Guatemala and the overwhelming response at the end was to start a LifeGroup. So, while you may not see how it is happening, God is definitely using technology to fuel community, drive accountability, mobilize prayer warriors, and motivate follower’s of Christ. There are limitations with baptism for sure. I would be interested in hearing what others have done on this matter. We also cannot meet the physical needs unless we took an offering up and sent money through PayPal, etc. But there are things that might cause issue with that.”

29. (2001) “Life Church was started in January of 1996 with a handful of people and a vision from God. Life Church held its first meeting in a rented dance studio. Within a few weeks the church had grown to over 130 people and moved to a nearby middle school. Life Church was only able to meet in the school for a short time and soon had to move again to a converted bicycle factory to accommodate its rapid growth.

By 1997, Life Church had moved twice and was averaging about 200 people each week in attendance. Life continued a steady growth pattern and completed a 750 seat worship center in the spring of 1999. By that time, Life Church had grown to over 1250 in weekly attendance and had three worship experiences each weekend. After moving to the new facility, Life Church grew to over 3000 people by the end of 2000.

In January of 2001, MetroChurch became a part of the Life Church family. MetroChurch was a 25-year-old, non-denominational church that was averaging close to 1000 people in one weekend worship experience. Life Church currently averages over 5500 people in 8 separate weekend worship experiences on two campuses.”

2004:

30. “The year 2002 was a testament to all that God can accomplish through His people. Life Church grew in ways that were far beyond our wildest dreams! The LifeChurch.tv Tulsa campus debuted on Easter Sunday. The Tulsa campus quickly outgrew its first location and moved to the Union Intermediate High School in September. Life Church reached over 6000 people each weekend through eight worship experiences on three campuses. In September,

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88 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2009/08/12/church-online-limitations/#comments
89 http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2009/08/12/church-online-limitations/#comments
"The Experience", a weekly worship experience, was born in Stillwater. Also in September, our television program, LifeTV launched in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa viewing areas.

God truly did some amazing things at all of the LifeChurch.tv campuses in 2003. By the year end, over 9000 people worshipped at one of twelve LifeChurch.tv experiences available each weekend on four campuses. One Night, a Sunday evening worship experience, began in February on the Edmond campus. Also in February, we unveiled the Life Development Plan - a tool designed to help us as we grow to become fully devoted followers of Christ. Construction on the Edmond Campus was completed in February and included a new auditorium and LifeKIDS space. The Oklahoma City Campus opened a new auditorium, which seats 2000 people, on June 15. In August, LifeKIDS unveiled the most dynamic, interactive children's program in the state at our Oklahoma City Campus. LifeChurch.tv Stillwater, the fourth LifeChurch.tv campus, launched in September and quickly had to add a second experience to accommodate the rapid growth. A second service was also added in Tulsa to hold the LifeChurch.tv family there. LifeTV has grown to reach around 20,000 people each week since it began in September of 2002. LifeChurch.tv experienced exponential growth as people from all over the world joined our online community to watch webcasts, participate in the forums, and be a part of all that God is doing. On Christmas Eve, history was made as LifeChurch.tv held the first live simulcast between the Edmond and Oklahoma City campuses. This huge step will allow us to reach many more people as God continues to use LifeChurch.tv to make eternal impacts in this world.”

2007:
31. “On Easter Sunday in 2002, the LifeChurch.tv Tulsa, OK Campus officially opened its doors in a hotel ballroom. The campus quickly outgrew this location and by September, began to meet each week in a local high school.

LifeChurch.tv Stillwater, the fourth LifeChurch.tv campus, was launched in September 2003. On Christmas Eve, history was made as LifeChurch.tv held the first live simulcast between the Edmond and Oklahoma City campuses. By year end, over 9000 people worshipped at one of twelve LifeChurch.tv experiences available each weekend on four campuses.

The year 2004 was off to a running start with the addition of three new worship experiences, allowing LifeChurch.tv to reach over 12,000 people through sixteen weekly worship experiences on four different campuses. In August, a satellite uplink was built at the Oklahoma City campus, providing the ability for LifeChurch.tv to send live video feed anywhere in the world. The LifeChurch.tv Tulsa Campus moved into location in October.

In early 2006, a church in Fort Worth, Texas, The Church at City View, became a part of LifeChurch.tv and is now known as the LifeChurch.tv Fort Worth, TX Campus. In April, two monumental initiatives took place: the launch of the LifeChurch.tv Internet Campus, which provided live church online for people around the world with the ability for genuine community, engaging volunteer opportunities, online LifeGroups and even mission opportunities on the Internet, and the launch of LifeChurch.tv Open, a tool that gives ministries everywhere the ability to download creative content, messages and resources

completely free of charge, no strings attached. In July, LifeChurch.tv once again joined forces with another ministry, Church Unplugged, and added its ninth campus, the LifeChurch.tv Hendersonville, TN Campus. At the end of 2006, LifeChurch.tv was averaging 18,000 people each weekend at a total of 40 worship experiences.

The year 2007 is off to an exciting start. LifeChurch.tv’s tenth campus was launched in February when a church in Wellington, FL (in the West Palm Beach area) decided to become a part of LifeChurch.tv. This campus is now known as LifeChurch.tv Wellington. On April 1, the doors to the LifeChurch.tv NW Oklahoma City, OK Campus were opened. Also in April, LifeChurch.tv launched its fully interactive campus in Second Life, the popular 3-D online virtual world. In April, three major events took place: the doors to the LifeChurch.tv NW Oklahoma City, OK Campus were opened; LifeChurch.tv launched its fully interactive campus in Second Life, the popular 3-D online virtual world; and LifeChurch.tv announced its twelfth campus, LifeChurch.tv Albany, in Albany, NY. Currently LifeChurch.tv is hosting nearly 20,000 people every weekend across all its campuses during 47 worship experiences.”92

2008:
32. “On a Saturday evening in January, [in 2001] Amy gave birth to their fourth son, Sam. It was obvious Craig wouldn’t be preaching on Sunday morning. Someone suggested we run video from the experience the night before. In that moment, an obstacle became an opportunity and the foundation was laid for how LifeChurch.tv would share its message with the world.” 93

“In April [in 2006], the LifeChurch.tv Internet Campus was launched. This revolutionary campus provides live church online for people around the world with the ability to engage in genuine community, unique volunteer opportunities, online LifeGroups, and even mission opportunities on the Internet.”94

Church Online Archived Church Online References
33. “Membership and the Internet Campus
Have you completed a communication card and checked that you would like more information about Membership at LifeChurch.tv? Well, here's the good news...we are going to have our first Internet Campus Membership Class! Now you are probably wondering if this "class" is going to be any fun? We can assure you that it will be. Read more to find out what you'll get to do at Membership Class.

Membership Class at LifeChurch.tv is a fun and informative introduction to life at LifeChurch.tv. You'll get to hear a personal message from Senior Pastor, Craig Groeschel, and his vision for the church. You will also learn a little bit about our history as a church and see some funny old footage from years ago. (Trust us, that makes it all worth it!) You will also have the opportunity to find out more about the requirements of membership and ways to get involved at LifeChurch - including volunteer opportunities, LifeGroups, tithing, and other ministries that we have to offer.

We hope you are excited about taking the next step to becoming a fully devoted follower of Christ. Sign up for our class - it will be Sunday, August 6th at 3:00pm CDT. You will get more information as we get nearer. The class will be held entirely online - so you don't even have to leave the comforts of home!

Membership Class at the Internet Campus
Sunday, August 6th
3:00pm CDT

34. “LifeGroups Have Begun
LifeGroups are beginning at the Internet Campus. There are many people who are becoming Internet Campus LifeGroup leaders and starting to form their groups. Other LifeGroups have already begun to meet in homes around the country.

If you feel the call to lead a LifeGroup in your community or here online at the Internet Campus, please send us an email. Write "LifeGroup Leader" in the subject line and we will send you an application that will provide you with details about beginning your incredible journey as a leader: internetcampus@lifechurch.tv.

To join a LifeGroup, simply send us an email and let us know you want to join an Internet Campus LifeGroup. We will add your name to the list to be sent to our leaders. You can also click on this link to read more about LifeGroups at LifeChurch.tv.”

“I think this is totally awesome!! Having a connection to a LifeGroup via the internet. I've been attending Life Church for about a year and a half now (mostly the Oklahoma City campus), and I was able to join a LifeGroup while I was home, but.. MY biggest problem is my job keeps me away from home and church a HUGE majority of the time. I feel like this is a great way to stay in touch with other people who are seeking after God's heart and we can learn and grow together. I really hope this thing gets off the ground and soars soon.”

Posted by: [name omitted] | July 31, 2006 04:00 AM


36. “I love that the Internet Campus reaches people right where they are. I have gotten to know so many people from around the world...that is exciting. When my wife and I left LA, we struggled with the move back to Oklahoma because our vision for reaching people had grown beyond one state. We prayed about it, and then LifeChurch.tv told us of a new concept...an Internet Campus. They offered us the job as Internet Campus Pastor, and we accepted. Now, through this Campus, we have not only reached people all over the United States, but we have reached people in 17 different countries. I had no idea what God had in store...I still don't, but I am loving every minute of seeing God's plan unfold!

Posted by: [name omitted] | June 5, 2006 08:20 PM”

37. “What I love most about the Internet Campus is the fact that we far-away LifeChurchers can now experience the worship, which was one thing I had always wanted to see after watching Craig’s messages. Some online donuts in the lobby would be good, but I guess we all have to do without sometimes.

Posted by: [name omitted] | June 5, 2006 09:52 PM”

38. “Now I live across the country, and I'm excited to know I can still be a part of the experience. I haven't always felt so at home in churches so I've missed it. In my spare time I play golf, work on my scrapbook and play and sing music. :)

Posted by: [name omitted] | June 5, 2006 11:07 PM”

39. “My favorite thing about the Internet campus is that I am getting to know people from all over. I actually look forward each week to seeing people from the previous week. There's life all around us and it's fun to be reminded of that each Sunday. My "God story" would have to be that I still can't fathom the fact that God loves me enough to have planned out a life for me. When I follow Him and feel that peace, it makes me feel so special that he cares about me personally (as He does all of you).

Posted by: [name omitted] | June 6, 2006 08:44 AM”

40. “I love being a part of the internet campus because I'm kind of shy when it comes to witnessing. This helps me to be more bold in reaching out to others in the name of Christ! I'm excited to see how God continues to use our campus to reach the www!

Posted by: [name omitted] | June 6, 2006 09:10 AM”

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
41. “My favorite thing about the internet campus is that I can worship God through the music online as well as hear Craig's message live.
I am still waiting for what God has in store for me.
Posted by: Anonymous | June 6, 2006 10:29 AM”

42. “My favorite thing about the Internet Campus is the people I get to meet with every week - newbies and veterans alike!
My favorite God story is about my nephew Noah, who only lived for 9 days after birth, but who affected more lives in 9 days without saying a word than any other person I've ever known. I love knowing he's in God's arms in heaven and that I get to be with them both someday...
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 6, 2006 12:26 PM”

43. “I'm looking forward to seeing the huge impact that the internet campus is going to have around the world.
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 6, 2006 10:57 PM”

44. “My favorite thing about LifeChurch? I'd have to say Craig's teaching but... The thing that really took me from being a participant, to being an evangelist (for LifeChurch) was the quality of the video production. You guys do a phenomenal job of incorporating video. It would take too many words to express my complete thoughts. Suffice to say -- you do great work!
Anyway... Good to "meet" you guys.
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 7, 2006 12:43 AM”

45. “I volunteer as a greeter for the Internet Campus and hang out some in the prayer chat room, usually by myself, but I want someone to be there in case someone needs prayer. So pop over and say hi, share your concerns and if you ask me I'll share mine!
I've enjoyed the internet campus, and have had occasion to talk to people across the country and around the world. How cool is that? I know God will use this and it will be a blessing to many. Yeah God!
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 9, 2006 12:01 PM”

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
46. “I can't wait to see where this church goes. The teaching is RIGHT ON! My kids are 10 & 12 and LOVE that they can tell THEIR friends to check out this HOT new site they found! lol I am not very tech savy and I hope by getting involved with internet church I can change my level of comfort on the web. Posted by: [name omitted] | June 9, 2006 12:50 PM” 107

47. “Hi my name is [name omitted]. I just moved from OKC to a small town and was sad to leave Lifetchurch, but am excited about the internet campus so I can continue to enjoy the amazing experience! If anyone is in the Sallisaw, OK, area, drop me a message! Posted by: [name omitted] | June 10, 2006 12:00 PM” 108

48. “Well anyway, My friend showed me and my mom-in-law by taking us to the Edmond campus. I was shocked and amazed and I've never felt the presense of the Holy Spirit so strongly. We attended the S. OCK campus on-and-off when it opened. I'm epileilptic and the Worship session always bothered me so I'm soooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo happy I can still attend my church via home! More personal stuff... My life consists of kids, Myspace, Art, but actually have a calling to be a witness in Japan... so if you know any Japanese speaking people... but yah... You can always see me on the Lobby chat Posted by: [name omitted] | June 11, 2006 09:21 AM” 109

49. “Since I travel the internet campus is a great way for me to stay connected and to serve. Posted by: [name omitted] | June 15, 2006 01:44 PM” 110

50. “I'm miss Life so much and I'm so excited that I can still be connected through the Internet Campus. If anyone's from Denver drop me a line. I haven't met very many people here yet and it would be nice if someone could show me the lay of land:-) Posted by: [name omitted] | June 18, 2006 02:21 AM” 111

51. “This is too cool. We are in the military, and we are now stationed in New Jersey. I used to attend the Tulsa campus about 2 years ago. We don't have a church here yet, and it is really

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html 107
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html 108
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html 109
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http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html 111
awesome to log on and see a familiar face, and listen to awesome sermons from a church that we trust. So Thank you! Jamie Dennis
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 20, 2006 10:07 PM” 112

52. “I really appreciate LiveChurch.tv. I don't work a normal schedule. I can't always go to a service. Now that I'm able to just log on, this is going to help a lot. If/When I have spare time, I like to spend it with my girl friend and dog. Most of it is at a park, playing in the South Carolina sunshine.
In my time in service, I've learned God is everywhere. In the darkest alleys, of the meanest cities, you can see His presence. From the smile of a child, to a hand-shake from someone who doesn't speak your language, you can see Him.
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 24, 2006 05:55 PM” 113

53. “I do however, understand most of the important stuff, but it takes a tremendous amount of effort and concentration. For me lifechurch.tv is such a wonderful treat and full of inspiration! I can not thank you enough! Don't worry though, I have not turned into one of those bedside baptist's, LOL, I'm as active as I can be at this time in our church. I host our youth group, participate in our weekly prayer meetings and serve on a committee, which is planning an evangelization camp for Labor Day weekend. I totally love the Lord, and I ask for your prayers for my three teenage daughters, who have not yet accepted the Lord as their saviour. Thank you and may God bless you all!
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 24, 2006 11:08 PM” 114

54. “I've always known LifeChurc was around, but I was invited out to a Saturday service last December and I really enjoyed my time there.
In my spare time, I enjoy watching the GameShow network, and Iron Chef America. I challenge anyone to a game of LINGO, so feel free to take me up on it!
I love the internet campus, and I can't wait to hopefully become rooted deeper in this community that LifeChurch has going here.
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 27, 2006 08:59 AM” 115

55. “I am not yet sure how this church is going to fit into my lifestyle, but I have been searching for a 'church' home for some time and this looks like the sort of thing that might work - Praise the Lord!!

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
In my spare time - I read, listen to worship CDs, watch Rugby (I told you I felt like a foreigner!), spend time with my family and play golf (when I can find four hours together!!). I look forward to getting to know some of you better. If you would like to know more, feel free to ask I will try to answer any reasonable requests.

Thank you Lifechurch for this opportunity to be a part of God's community again!

Posted by: [name omitted] | June 30, 2006 06:26 AM

56. “Welcome to the Internet Campus...

First time to visit our campus? We'd like to show you around. Take your time and get comfortable here - we want you to be at home at LifeChurch.tv. We will start with a quick tour of our site. If you ever have any questions, you can click on the icon on the home page of the Internet Campus that reads "Need Help?" and a live person will answer your question or you can send an email to our Guest Services department to get a response by email.

Let's begin by looking around the Internet Campus home page. You will see an area at the very top of the page that asks you to Register or Login. Once you've registered with our site, you will have access to many options reserved for our registered users. Some of the options include a more interactive experience in our Lobby Chat and the advantage of easy access to forms and information. If you have already registered with our site, simply click "Login". If you have not yet registered, begin by clicking "Register" and follow the steps.

In the top right hand corner of the campus home page, you will see a LIVE button. This button is how you will enter the experience during one of the three times each week, Saturdays at 7:00 pm CDT and Sundays at 10:00 am and 11:30 am CDT. When the button is RED, simply click to enter our live experience which includes your choice of worship by two LifeChurch.tv worship leaders and a message from Senior Pastor, Craig Groeschel.

There are many other ways to engage with the community you will find at the Internet Campus. One of the most popular and meaningful features of the Internet Campus site is our Lobby Chat. If you would like to connect with others and engage in spiritual and thoughtful conversation, simply click on the link called "Lobby Chat". You will be asked to login, if you are a registered user you can at that time, or to continue as a guest. The Lobby Chat is visited by many of our visitors each week and serves as a gathering place for fellowship and for building relationships. You can also meet with our Senior Pastor, Craig Groeschel, and the Internet Campus Pastor, Brandon Donaldson, in the Lobby Chat.

Fill out a Communication Card (you can find the link on our campus home page) to sign up for our weekly campus newsletter, give us more information about yourself and your family, and to let us know about any important decisions you've made during the experience. You can also ask to receive more information about Baptism, LifeGroups and our Youth and LifeKIDS programs. You will find even more features available during our Live Experience.

http://web.archive.org/web/20070129013953/http://blog.lifechurch.tv/Internet/2006/06/get_to_know_each_other.html
As we mentioned before, please click on "Need Help?" if you have technical problems or questions or if you simply want more information or to talk to someone during our live experience.

We welcome you to the Internet Campus at LifeChurch.tv. We look forward to seeing you each and every weekend and we hope you find LifeChurch.tv to be a place you want to call home. Enjoy the experience, and remember whoever finds God, finds life.
June 2, 2006 10:25 PM in News | Permalink

57. “Internet Campus Launch
Are you ready for this? Mark your calenders ladies and gentlemen... Saturday, June 3rd at 7:00pm CDT and Sunday, June 4th at 10:00 and 11:30am CDT! We will be marketing on Myspace.com with over 3 million ads being seen. We will also market on Facebook and Google.

58. We reflect with humble hearts on all that God has done on the Internet Campus during the last 6 weeks of preview experiences. The participation has been tremendous. This is what it looked like: Over 130 hands responding to a relationship with Christ, over 1,800 people participating, countless lives changed.

Isn’t it exciting to think about what God has in store for the Internet Campus as we officially launch to the public? Get excited. Tell people about it. Invite them to join you on June 3rd and 4th. See lives change.
May 25, 2006 01:38 PM in News | Permalink

59. this is so awesome to worship with my brothers and sisters, and never miss a sermon! when I go back to the South OKC campus I'm right in step, cause I was able to attend every minute right here!!! praise God, and my all enjoy this blesing!!!
Posted by: [name omitted] | May 28, 2006 09:44 AM

60. I am excited to be able to continue to worship, even after moving to CA 3 years ago, and not being in the building for that long!
Posted by: [name omitted] | June 3, 2006 02:42 AM

61. “Church Online? Seriously!
Sometimes a building is incorrectly labeled as the church. In actuality, the people are the church. That is why it is so exciting to be a part of LifeChurch.tv's Internet Campus.

The Internet Campus really brings a new dimension to church. It doesn't change the purpose and function of the church, just the presentation. The Internet becomes a really cool building

that can open its doors to anyone around the world and have them participate at one time together. We have already seen that happen in the last 3 weekends with 17 countries taking part.

To redefine the presentation of church while keeping the purpose and function is such a revolutionary thought. There are many good questions to struggle with, and there are many things to be learned in this new frontier. But one thing is certain, The message of God's love through Jesus Christ was intended for the world. LifeChurch.tv is excited to be a part of that pure and simple. We will do anything short of sin to share that good news to the world and lead them to become fully devoted followers of Christ.

Passionately Pursuing Christ,

Brandon Donaldson
Internet Campus Pastor

What do you think? Share your comments.
May 4, 2006 01:31 PM in News | Permalink”

Comments

My mother visited OKC over Easter weekend. She LOVED the experience. I told her she could see it from Arkansas, and she went crazy. She checked it out last week and called to tell me all about it. I had to remind her I was there. My sister in Germany will be watching this weekend. She is moving back in June, so I am excited for her to actually be able to meet Pastor Craig. Anyway, this is the best thing ever to hit the internet! Thank you so much for giving my family members the chance to check out MY passion in Life.

Posted by: [name omitted] | May 4, 2006 04:32 PM

62. I have a question for everyone out there participating in the internet campus.

What are some ways, that you can think of, that we can build community over the internet? Fire'em off and don't be shy, we know your out there!

Posted by: [name omitted] | May 5, 2006 08:28 AM

That is a great discussion, [name omitted]. I will start.

Life Groups are so important at LifeChurch.tv. Getting together with small groups of people for deep Biblical community. This is a great way for people to connect.

The Internet Campus has such broad reach that it brings up two great possibilities. One possibility is that small groups meet online using the webchat tool (soon this will be an option). Second, small groups of people could meet physically together at locations all over the world.

The question is how does that help us now. Well, maybe God is calling you to start a Life Group where you live. LifeChurch.tv has the tools. You just provide the place and the people.

That is one idea that we will implement. What other communities ideas do we have?
Posted by: Brandon Donaldson | May 5, 2006 01:24 PM

I like the lobby chat. I am already looking forward to seeing certain people each week. We chat before and after service. Sometimes at church you run in and run out. This makes you feel like you have a little more time in my opinion. I also like that there are no physical boundaries keeping us apart. We are all equal. To me, the weekly chat is a great way for me to feel a part of the IC community. I look forward to maybe weekly prayer requests (just a thought). The possibilities are endless, but YES, community can happen on the Internet.
Posted by: [name omitted] | May 5, 2006 01:52 PM

My family belongs to the Tulsa Campus, but in October we moved to St. Maarten. Wes my husband is in Medical school here. I was so upset that we (we have a 2 year old Ashley) were moving so far away. I had finally found a church and church family that I loved. We would watch the messages every Wed. night, but it was not the same. Then Todd e-mailed me about the internet campus. I was so excited!! I cried when the first experience came on. I now feel back home with my church. Thank you to everyone who made this possible!! Thank you again so much
Posted by: [name omitted] | May 5, 2006 05:49 PM

I love that there is an internet campus. I'm from Texas and this weekend was the first weekend that I traveled home after starting to attend Lifechurch OKC.... I was pumped knowing I wouldn't miss anything and that I could log on and continue to watch the series from the internet. Thank you Lifechurch!
Posted by: [name omitted] | May 7, 2006 11:06 AM

I worship at the Tulsa Campus but I'm moving to Tahlequah in about 3-4 weeks. The Internet Campus is an awesome idea. Any suggestions on how I would go about starting a LifeGroup in Tahlequah?
Posted by: [name omitted] | May 9, 2006 02:04 PM

I recently moved to Mexico, MO and was getting really homesick in OKC and LifeChurch but since the internet campus is up, I am just a mouse click away. Thank you Jesus!
Posted by: [name omitted] | May 12, 2006 02:09 PM

I no longer live in the OKC area and miss attending LifeChurch in both Edmond & OKC (hey the different start times can be important if you're running a bit behind). I am impressed with the leadership and teaching that the church has provided. I am now in Springfield, MO and by using the internet, I can still feel somewhat connected to the church and Pastor Craig's awesome messages. While it is so true that Christ's passion was for establishing local churches where lives can be built together, it is equally true that the "church" goes far beyond the confines of brick and mortar ministry into an ever expanding world of relocation and
need. Thank you all for putting the tremendous effort into this extensive platform that keeps connection possible and ministry flowing.

Posted by: [name omitted] | May 18, 2006 06:18 PM

I visited Life church 2 weeks ago with my best friend and the service was AWESOME! Thank you so much for having the online service. I plan to come again.

Love,

[name omitted].

Posted by: Lauren Davis | May 21, 2006 11:16 AM

Love internet church! Great idea! Awesome, PTL! Keep up God's glorious work!

Posted by: [name omitted] | May 30, 2006 07:47 PM

63. “I dont feel left behind. I do belong to the OKC campus but i so appreciate the internet campus. Have a great day!

Posted by: [name omitted] | April 30, 2006 12:34 PM

64. “I just want you to know how much i enjoy the internet campus . I am a single mother, own my own business and sometimes my sunday mornings do not go as planned. It is nice if the kids arent cooperating or someone is sick that i can still connect with everyone for faith support and guidance in my life. I dont feel left behind. I do belong to the OKC campus but i so appreciate the internet campus. Have a great day!

Posted by: [name omitted] | April 30, 2006 12:34 PM

I'm originally from Oklahoma City, but moved to Washington D.C. almost two years ago. Before I moved here, I began attending Life Church and was blown away not only by the worship and atmosphere, but the sermon as well. Finding a church that has an amazing worship experience AND sermon is really hard to find! Given what a great experience I was having at Life Church, I was really disappointed that I would no longer be able to attend. I found a church here in DC that's pretty good, but it couldn't match my experience back home. So, I began watching Pastor Craig's sermons online to get my "fix" for the week. However, I would be reminded every time I'd go back home that I was still missing a large part of what I enjoy so much about your church. I've even contemplated moving back home just to become more involved at Life Church. (That isn't all that realistic though.) Bottom line, the new internet campus is incredible! Last week was my first time in this experience and I couldn't believe how amazing it was! Even from DC, I felt like I was actually back home, sitting in the sanctuary! Thank you so much for always pushing the envelope and never settling for the norm! Being able to participate in Life Church has really met a need in my life! Thank you!


God is good!
We started attending life at the end of 1999. In 2002 we moved to Enid, America. After much searching we felt called to stay at Life. We needed to be in a Lifegroup, but there were none in this area so we started one. It became increasingly difficult for our members to drive every week. (1:15 each way) So, we began watching the sermons online. The main thing that was missing was the music. So, we have been mixing our own music to play before the sermon...all the while wishing Life would put the music online as well.
We realized there are copyright issues, but with the advent of the live broadcast that problem seems to be taken care of. PTL!
We have many in the community that have been watching us. We've even approached our local theater to see if we can play the sermon's there. (better seats) Our lifegroup raised enough money to buy a projector so now we can watch it on the big screen. It's really been exciting to see this whole thing come together.
We still attend Life when we are in town, but now we never miss a service.
Pray that God will direct our path.

I love the internet campus. We recently moved to New Hampshire from Stillwater and have been looking for a church up here. The state is very dry when it comes to good churches.
Having attended Life Church for the past 3 years I know the teaching and what to expect. I have been missing this for a while and the internet is a way for me to refresh myself and get some top notch teaching. It is not the same as being there live but it is the next best thing. I will definitely be back next week and hope this campus takes off like every other campus has.
Thank you Craig and everyone else for making it possible to be back home for at least one hour every week.

I checked out the internet campus the second week it was on. I felt so blessed to see what God was doing with LifeChurch.tv. There are many people in all of the countries of this world that need a place like this. There are many young adults that need a place like the internet campus. I pray to God in Heaven that He will lead many people to the Internet Campus that need this in their lives. Thank you Jesus for what you are doing at Life Church and God bless Craig, Brandon, and the rest of the people that have started this campus online. This is truly a gift from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

I've been going to school in England during the year, and LifeChurch has been such a blessing. I had been going back and watching the message series to stay connected to what LifeChurch is doing. Now the launch of the internet campus makes me feel even more part of a group of believers... even when I'm far away from home. I've also told several friends about
the internet campus, and they are all hooked on Life Church. Such an incredible way to spread God's love around the world!

Posted by: [name omitted] | May 18, 2006 12:33 PM

I attended Life Church in Edmond from late 1990s until 2001 when I moved to Tulsa and then I attended and led a singles home group when that campus was created. I had to move to Austin in 2004 and have not been able to find a church like Life Church. Gateway Community Church is similar but not quite enough. I am so glad to be apart of the internet and I hope to get some of my friends here in Austin connected.

Posted by: [name omitted] | May 21, 2006 05:39 PM

65. “LifeGroups on the Internet Campus

LifeGroups are such an important part of LifeChurch.tv. You have come to the Internet Campus at such an incredible time. We have just begun our preview experiences and are in the development stage of LifeGroups. Can you imagine LifeGroups all over the world engaging in real Biblical Community? Small groups of people coming together at physical locations across the globe, as well as small groups meeting on the internet using brand new internet technologies. LifeGroups with no limits!

Already we have had many people from the Internet Campus interested in learning more about LifeGroups. Are you interested in LifeGroups? Are you interested in leading a Lifegroup? We want to hear from you. If you are interested in leading a LifeGroup or getting more information please contact us at internetcampus@lifechurch.tv.

April 20, 2006 10:13 AM in LifeGroups | Permalink

66. “Our First Preview Experiences...

April 16th was an incredible Easter weekend. The Internet Campus had its very first preview experiences. In the first experience we had over 167 people with 19 people committing their lives to Christ. In the second experience we had over 118 people with 4 people committing their lives to Christ. That is over 285 people with 23 commitments on the first weekend the Internet Campus is live.

Wow....isn't it exciting to imagine what God is going to do next? We get to be a part of God's plan to change lives all over the world, and that is what it is all about. There are so many stories of what God did last week through the Internet Campus, and we want to here about it. If you would like to share your story, post your comment to the right of this blog. God is good...all the time!

April 18, 2006 01:46 PM in News | Permalink


67. “A Note from the Internet Campus Pastor

My name is Brandon Donaldson, and I am the campus pastor for the LifeChurch.tv Internet Campus. I have been involved with LifeChurch.tv since 1998, and I have enjoyed watching and experiencing God-driven change in thousands of people’s lives. In 2004, I moved to LA, California with my wife and two boys to pursue a degree. During my time away from LifeChurch.tv, I was reminded of God’s love for people; I was reminded of the enormous amount of people who are lost without a personal relationship with Christ; I was reminded of the job, or better yet the opportunity still ahead of us to get the message of Jesus to those people.

It’s an exciting time to be a part of what God is doing here at LifeChurch.tv, to be a part of a church that will always do everything possible to reach people for Christ. The Internet Campus is the newest campus at LifeChurch.tv, which will enable us to continue the incredible journey of leading people to become fully devoted followers of Christ.

The internet campus provides a completely real-time experience that includes live music, a live Internet Campus Pastor, and live teaching. We have built it in such a way that people can become part of this community not just by observing LifeChurch.tv but by becoming engaged in what God is doing here. Using a dedicated internet campus staff and brand-new internet technologies (multi-user web chat, live support software) we have incorporated the elements and ministries that are core to LifeChurch.tv, and will provide opportunities to be a part of biblical community, to serve on the campus, to commit to LifeChurch.tv membership, to participate in a life group, and on-and-on.

The internet campus is combining the powerful life-changing message of God’s love with the most powerful communication tool available in the world. As we continue this pioneering work, we will continue to improve the look and functionality of the internet campus, so that it becomes a more effective campus and tool to lead people to Christ. This is just the beginning of what I believe will be a revolution in the way we use technology to be a part of what God wants to do in our world. Just imagine, anyone from anywhere in the US or the world with just the click of a mouse button can join together at LifeChurch.tv and be challenged weekly to be fully devoted followers of Christ.

Isn’t it exciting to be on the ground floor of what God is going to do here at LifeChurch.tv?

God bless,
Brandon
March 10, 2006 05:09 PM in AnnouncementsNews | Permalink”

68. “What an answer to prayer.

We've been using lifechurch.tv for years. We live in Enid, OK and sometimes the drive is just too much. So, we've used the online sermons to stay connected and worship at home.

THE PROBLEM: no music.

BUT! You all have solved that! Thanks! We appreciate what you're doing to build the kingdom.

Posted by: [name omitted] | April 16, 2006 09:29 PM"