

# Minecraft Church



Rev Kevin Colyer explains how churches can use gaming to explore faith and build community. Kevin is the M:Power Urban Evangelist at St James Church, Over Darwen (Diocese of Blackburn).

Every other Thursday evening in a usually chilly church on the edge of a council estate near Blackburn, gaming-mad young people drag their siblings, parents and friends along to Minecraft Church. Some come with Android tablets under their arms, others without. After the rush for the biscuits, they gather around different tables, pick up a tablet or a Chromebook and log into the blocky 3D world of the Minecraft™ game. Some weeks they first gather around a table to knead dough to be baked into bread for Holy Communion later. Some head to a Lego™ pit, some to a craft table, some start making little stop-motion movies using Minecraft™ action figures.

When we start, there is a rush and small scrap over who gets to say the opening prayer, then we get stuck in. We read a Jesus story from the Gospels or a parable and then the challenge is on: What does this mean to us? What does it make us think about? How can we work together to build this in the shared world of the game or in Lego™ or through some creative way?



Who are all the young people (and their long-suffering parents)? Almost all are completely new to church and would not attend on Sundays or come to a normal church. For them Minecraft Church has become their church, where they are learning what following Jesus means, how to love, pray and care for each other and the world.

I've always been techie and enjoy computer gaming, although, Minecraft™ is my children's game of choice, not mine! Minecraft™ is the single most popular game in the world. However, there are few games like it: Minecraft™ has a competitive mode, but it also has a creative mode. When in creative mode, it unlocks an evocative way to build and create whole worlds to inhabit and play in together.

One day, during lockdown, my kids were struggling to engage at all with a recorded church service; it was about Joseph and his dreams. I remember saying to my twin boys, why don't you network together and build the dreams in Minecraft™? They disappeared for 45 minutes and came back having re-imagined



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the dreams in Minecraft™. The poor baker was surrounded with a flock of noisy parrots pecking at the bread on his head! That was the germination of the idea of how we could use Minecraft™ for discipleship. When young people passionately engage with the big story of the Bible, discipleship emerges.

## How does it work?

Minecraft Church is hard to explain, you have to see it in action! At its core, we run a server for the Minecraft™ game on a laptop. We share access to this via Wi-Fi to those in the building, so it's only those physically present who can join and build together. We have invested in various tablets and laptops for kids to borrow if they don't bring a device along. They chat over the tables, hatching plans on how to build this or that creation.

Teamwork makes it all happen. We have people good with tech and others good with people or upfront leading. Those with artistic gifts are great at shaping our crafts and working alongside the kids. And the flow of tea and biscuits lubricates it all.

Towards the end of the building time, we go round the room and show off what we each have made, but more importantly why we made it. What are we discovering about Jesus through all of this? It bowls us all over to see the depth and insight even the youngest bring to the mix. Sometimes we then head into Communion with a special liturgy to highlight the creativity of God's salvation and our own active response to him; we break the bread we made ourselves to worship Jesus with.

It is a wonderful and wild ride. Our young people are very regular in coming and growing in confidence and faith. It seems to have a wonderful pull towards those completely new to faith but spiritually curious. It's safe too for the neurodiverse.

## What could you and your church build together?

For more information about Minecraft Church, you can head to [www.minecraftchurch.uk](http://www.minecraftchurch.uk) to discover more.

🎧 Melanie and Kevin dive into gaming and how to run Minecraft Church on the Roots for Churches podcast: [rootsforchurches.podbean.com](http://rootsforchurches.podbean.com)