Session 04.01 - New mission fields — going where people are

Lab: Hope Lab 1: New mission fields — going where people are
Date: 6 October 2026, 16:30–18:00
Room: Vjosa
Facilitator: Matthias Boehning
Expert contributor: Daniel Schoenke, Co-Lead Unit Digital | Lead Team Gaming, Allianz Mission e. V., Germany
Note-taker: Matthias Boehning
Approximate number of participants: 25

1. Purpose of today's session

Explore gaming communities as mission fields and learn how Christians can be intentionally and relationally present within them. Consider practical ministry models, pathways into discipleship and ways churches can support Christian gamers.

2. Starting point

The session began with the question:

What does it mean to understand digital communities not simply as communication channels, but as genuine mission fields in which Christians are intentionally and relationally present?

Daniel addressed this through four ministry examples, drawing on interviews conducted using questions supplied by Matthias. He organised his contribution around digital spaces, relationships and lessons for European churches and organisations.

3. Key insights

- **Digital communities are neighbourhoods.** Real people build relationships and experience belonging within games, Discord servers and streams. Digital and physical life are increasingly intertwined.
- **Mission begins with relational presence.** Shared play, genuine curiosity, humour and consistent participation create opportunities to discover where God is already at work.
- **Trust requires time and respect.** Listening, keeping promises, allowing different perspectives and accepting someone's "no" to a faith conversation are essential.
- **Healthy communities combine boundaries with ownership.** Clear rules matter, alongside members taking responsibility for one another and the community's culture.

- **Discipleship is the underlying fifth approach.** Churches can equip Christian gamers already embedded in these communities to recognise God's presence in their gaming and express their faith naturally.
- **Gaming reaches beyond youth ministry.** Daniel described gamers across ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds and income groups. His numerical estimates were not independently verified during the session.

4. Challenges identified

- Church assumptions that separate "virtual" relationships from "real" relationships can hinder understanding of digital communities.
- Online evangelism does not automatically provide sustained discipleship, counselling or a supportive church community.
- Individual evangelists may become responsible for needs beyond their calling or capacity.
- Digital participation cannot provide every form of physical connection. Baptism, marriage, bereavement and other embodied experiences raise practical and theological questions.
- Denominational differences can complicate cooperation around baptism and church identity.
- Gaming identity, unhealthy habits and time use require thoughtful discipleship.

5. Ideas and possible solutions

- Equip existing Christian gamers rather than relying exclusively on specialist digital missionaries.
- Learn gaming culture and participate regularly in communities connected to genuine personal interests.
- Use shared stories, experiences and everyday questions as openings for conversations about faith.
- Plan for the whole faith journey and establish partnerships where a ministry cannot provide every element.
- Develop hybrid participation that connects people online and physically. Nerdch's example included sermon questions through live chat and interaction between both groups.
- Support changes in priorities and habits through discipleship. Daniel emphasised transformation through relationship with God and repeated choices over time.

6. Examples, projects and useful resources

- **Organisation/project:** Diak — individual gaming missionary
  What can be learned: Sustained presence within existing communities can lead to trusted pastoral relationships. Members of three gaming communities/clans recognise him as a community or clan pastor.
  Contact or link: Not recorded.
- **Organisation/project:** Faith and Pixels
  What can be learned: Ruben, Robin and Max combine streaming, shared play and Discord community to make space for faith and honest questions.
  Contact or link: Not recorded.
- **Organisation/project:** Nerdch — hybrid church in Frankfurt
  What can be learned: Digital and physical participants can share church life through intentional interaction. Daniel described it as a congregation within Germany's Federation of Free Evangelical Churches.
  Contact or link: Not recorded.
- **Organisation/project:** Main Quest Ministries
  What can be learned: A para-church hub can equip and connect Christians through a community, academy and network, primarily serving the German-speaking region.
  Contact or link: https://mainquest.org/
- **Organisation/project:** Creedle — name as transcribed; spelling to confirm
  What can be learned: Making Christian resources and churches discoverable online may help connect seekers with suitable communities. Matthias noted that representatives were attending HOPE.
  Contact or link: Connect with representatives at HOPE; exact contact details not recorded.
- **Organisation/project:** Daniel's presentation and Allianz Mission gaming ministry
  What can be learned: Comparative examples and practical principles for ministry in gaming communities. Daniel committed to sending his presentation to Matthias and permitted its sharing.
  Contact or link: https://www.allianzmission.de/mitarbeitende/daniel-schoenke/

A practical testimony described a Christian gamer seeking reconciliation after a heated League of Legends match. Explaining his motivation through God's love led to further conversation; the other player later reported beginning to read the Bible.

7. Opportunities for European collaboration

- Connect Christian gamers, churches, evangelical alliances and mission agencies across countries.
- Share community guidelines, training materials and experience from existing ministries.

- Build referral relationships between digital evangelists, discipleship communities, pastoral support and local churches.
- Explore partnerships between gaming communities and platforms that help people discover Christian resources.
- Learn together about hybrid church participation and denominational questions.

8. Decisions and points of agreement

- Matthias encouraged interested participants to connect with the Creedle representatives attending HOPE.

9. Open questions or different perspectives

- How can online interest in faith develop into sustained discipleship and connection with a physical church?
- When does a digital Christian community function as someone's church, regardless of its organisational designation?
- How should hybrid communities support baptism, marriage, bereavement and physical fellowship across denominational traditions?
- How can churches affirm gaming as a possible mission context while addressing unhealthy habits and whole-life submission to Christ?
- What will church look like as digital participation and AI develop? Daniel offered guiding principles rather than a fixed model.

Enrico, from the Italian Evangelical Alliance, raised the tension between strong gamer identity and the gospel's call to surrender one's whole life to Christ. Daniel emphasised transformation from within, changing priorities and habits, and the possibility of gaming remaining a healthy part of life.

10. Three key takeaways

Draft synthesis for review.

1. **Go where people already are:** gaming communities are places for intentional presence, friendship and Christian witness.
2. **Equip Christians who already belong there:** discipleship helps gamers connect faith with everyday relationships and behaviour.
3. **Build connected pathways:** collaboration and hybrid participation can link evangelism, discipleship, pastoral care and physical fellowship.

11. Message to the wider HOPE community

As a HOPE Lab, we believe that gaming communities are mission fields where Christians can represent Christ through authentic relationships, respectful engagement and everyday acts of love. We encourage churches and mission organisations to connect and equip Christian gamers, and to work together so that encounters with faith can grow into sustained discipleship and community.

12. Handover to the next session

- Move from recognising the mission field to identifying practical ways churches can equip Christian gamers.
- Develop concrete examples of pathways from online engagement to discipleship, pastoral support and local church relationships.
- Explore what meaningful hybrid belonging looks like, including its physical and theological dimensions.
- Identify potential partners and turn collaboration opportunities into specific next steps.