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Texas church launches national virtual Easter egg hunt

by Tess Schoonhoven, posted Monday, April 06, 2020 (21 days ago)

ARLINGTON, Texas (BP) -- Simply by playing video games with his own children, Curtis James came up with a ministry idea that has gone nationwide.



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The virtual Easter egg hunt, to be hosted on a Minecraft server Easter Sunday, April 12, stemmed from the desire of Tate Springs Baptist Church to engage entire families, both adults and children, even as meeting together was not an option during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"After looking through some online options my mind went to a game I had played with my own children," said James, family pastor at Tate Springs, who added that using the popular game that allows people to interact virtually while building made sense because, "It was a place most kids have already been that we could gather together for Bible Study, fun and an Easter egg hunt."

Initially, the plan was to serve the church family. But when others became aware of the idea, interest grew -- and James quickly realized more people would be hunting virtual Easter eggs than they had planned. The National Esports Association (NEA), a nonprofit educational organization, stepped in to offer free expertise and resources to Tate Springs.

"They feel it is a great opportunity to come together in a time when people feel separated," James said. "They have the tools to allow the event to grow exponentially."

James said the NEA is now hosting the Easter egg hunt on its servers and is designing a server that will be better equipped for such a large group of participants.

"We are now capable of handling a nationwide event, so we encourage churches from all over to join us to celebrate the resurrection," James said.

In addition to creating a space for families to have fun together, the event itself will feature components designed to share the Gospel.

"Anyone who participates will receive a video sharing the Gospel with a way to contact us with questions," James explained. "It is our desire to connect anyone who makes a decision with a local church to follow up with them."

James said they will be posting a Gospel video and music on video game livestreaming services including the NEA Mixer account, Tate Spring's Twitch account and Facebook Live.

The event has garnered widespread attention, including from secular news outlets, because of its creativity during a time when most traditional events related to Easter have been canceled. James said several organizations including libraries have inquired and would like to participate. He is beginning to envision new possibilities for outreach avenues.

"This is an open door for future engagement," James said. "I have had many in our community reach out to me to get their child connected to our server and Easter event."

Jared Wellman, lead pastor at Tate Springs, said the potential for ministry in this area is only just beginning.

"We are on the front end of the possibilities, but our minds are already spinning," Wellman said. "We believe people will have an appetite for these kinds of virtual events in the future."

Other churches are latching onto the idea as well, creating Minecraft worlds of their own by referencing the tutorial videos Tate Springs' staff has created.

James said he was personally encouraged to see conversation surrounding Easter shift to a positive note.

"There's a lot of bad news out there right now and celebrating the resurrection together is the best news," James said. "We want everyone to know that Jesus is alive and that even in dark times we can celebrate who He is and what He has done."

Tess Schoonhoven is a Baptist Press staff writer.