

# Online Journal of Space Communication

---

Volume 2  
Issue 5 *Satellites Address the Digital Divide*  
(Fall 2003)

Article 5

---

June 2021

## Current Development: How One Faith-Based Organization Uses Satellite Technology to Bridge the Digital Divide

Jeffrey B. Roberts

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/spacejournal>



Part of the [Astrodynamics Commons](#), [Navigation, Guidance, Control and Dynamics Commons](#), [Space Vehicles Commons](#), [Systems and Communications Commons](#), and the [Systems Engineering and Multidisciplinary Design Optimization Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Roberts, Jeffrey B. (2021) "Current Development: How One Faith-Based Organization Uses Satellite Technology to Bridge the Digital Divide," *Online Journal of Space Communication*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 5 , Article 5. Available at: <https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/spacejournal/vol2/iss5/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the OHIO Open Library Journals at OHIO Open Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Online Journal of Space Communication by an authorized editor of OHIO Open Library. For more information, please contact [debord@ohio.edu](mailto:debord@ohio.edu).

## How One Faith-Based Organization Uses Satellite Technology to Bridge the Digital Divide

Jeffrey B. Roberts  
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

---

From its founding in 1830, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has endeavored to fulfill the divine command to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world remains a daunting challenge even in modern times. How does a religious organization preach its doctrine to people of all nations, race, cultures, etc? How does it support its growing membership and provide the necessary training for new members and new leaders? How does it assure that its teachings remain consistent around the world? How does it help people in far off locations feel included in the organization as a whole?



Installation in Russia

How can its leaders maintain contact with the members at large as they continue to spread around the globe? These are all challenges faced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, today one of the world's fastest growing religious faiths, with more than 11 million members in 160 nations and territories.

Exceptional and frequent communication is key to meeting these challenges. The digital divide compounds the difficulties of communication, however. The disparity of communications infrastructures found in international settings impedes the ability of any organization to provide common experiences among its members.



Members Await Busses

President Spencer W. Kimball, 12th President of the Church, perhaps foreseeing these challenges, said in 1974: "When we've used the satellite and related discoveries to their greatest potential, and all of the media-the papers, magazines, television, radio-all to their greatest power, then and not until then shall we approach the insistence of our Lord and Master to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

The Church began using a private satellite network to broadcast its semi-annual General Conference to church meetinghouses in the United States in the early

1980s. The system grew slowly in correlation with the populous of Church membership. Locations without satellite systems received videotaped copies of General Conference and other broadcasts some time after the event. While these tapes were appreciated, they lacked the immediacy and impact of the original broadcast.

The satellite system used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has since grown to an international system with over 5,000 meetinghouse downlinks worldwide. It utilizes uplinks in Utah, Hawaii, and Washington, DC. The system is now used on a regular basis to broadcast various church conferences and special meetings, and to conduct global leadership training. Members of the Church worldwide now have the opportunity to go to a meetinghouse in their local area to attend these meetings and participate along with those living closer to Church headquarters.

The meetings are broadcast in as many as 56 languages simultaneously so members can hear talks in their native tongues. The impact of the satellite system is most noticeable in new locations after a recent installation. Members are able to see and hear leaders of the Church live, often for the first time. Comments such as the following are typical:

"It is unbelievable that starting this new century, we'll have the chance to see the General Conference in a live transmission. When we saw the Church President touched by the Spirit, we all felt the same. It is a whole new experience, we were able to see the assembly facility thousands of miles away and feel so close."

The use of satellite technology has helped bridge the digital divide by improving the Church's communication with its membership around the globe. Because of their independence from local infrastructure, satellites have helped bring the same communication capabilities to meetinghouses in Guatemala or Fiji as those in California or New York. This improved communication helps bridge other divides, making members feel included in the organization regardless of their location. It improves communication by providing the same message at (relatively) the same time to everyone.

In addition to satellites, the Church has used the Internet increasingly in recent years to help further its mission and to reach those without access to the Church's satellite system. Its family history or genealogy website, [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org), is one of the most popular sites on the Internet, with an average of 14 million hits per day. [Providentliving.org](http://Providentliving.org) is the Church's newest website. It provides information to assist people with employment, food storage and emergency preparedness, physical health, education, and humanitarian assistance. Through the Church's main website, [lds.org](http://lds.org), people around the world obtain access to news of the Church, General Conference talks, scripture and gospel study resources, and even streaming media of select Church broadcasts.

The Church has also researched how it might use the satellite system in conjunction with the Internet to bring greater services to its facilities worldwide.

Joseph Smith, the first President of the Church, declared: "The truth of God will go forth boldly, till it has penetrated every continent and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished." Another Church scripture states: "For, verily, the sound must go forth from this place into all the world, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth-the gospel must be preached unto every creature." Satellite and other technologies are helping The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bridge the divides that stand in the way of the fulfillment of these bold pronouncements.