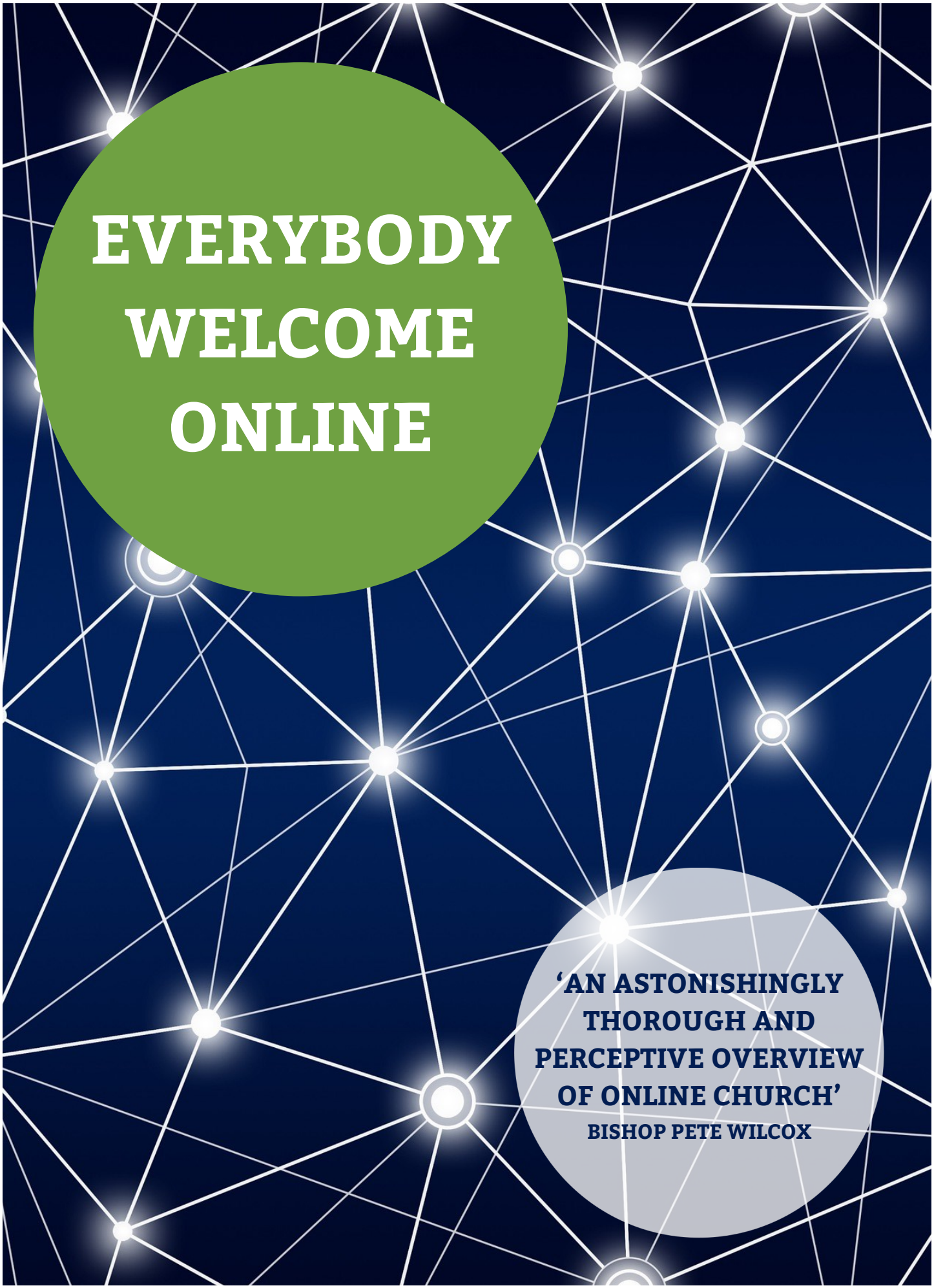

BOB JACKSON AND GEORGE FISHER

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW

We are the authors of the church training course 'Everybody Welcome' (Church House Publishing), which helps churches invite, welcome and integrate newcomers, and so to grow. In our current situation much of this course is redundant.

We have a new challenge – how to contact, welcome, minister to and integrate the large numbers of people who seem to be accessing online church. Having our buildings closed down was a nasty shock. But those of us who have moved online have stumbled into a vast new mission and ministry world.

We have spent a frantic week contacting people to find out what is going on, sift out good practice, condense some wisdom, and lift our eyes for the bigger picture of what God seems to be doing.

If our findings are helpful or inspiring then please copy or refer them to as many of your contacts as possible. We would like them to go viral. We should not struggle on our own but learn from each other.

We'll update as we learn more – from you! So please email us your stories, wisdom, corrections and ideas so we can share them on our webpage.

We have five sections to offer:

- **Part 1:** What is going on and what is God doing?
- **Part 2:** Who is responding and why?
- **Part 3:** Welcoming well in the lockdown church
- **Part 4:** Welcoming the crowds when lockdown is over
- **Part 5:** Learning together

But we baby boomers are trying to learn foreign languages in order to communicate. We'd love to partner with one or two young native speakers – could that be you?

We've prepared these materials together but 'I' in the text refers to Bob, who has done most of the final writing.

The Ven Bob Jackson and The Rev George Fisher

'This is an astonishingly thorough and perceptive overview of Online Church, given the speed at which it has been produced: accessible, practical and full of practical tips. It will give the novice the confidence to get started — but most "experts" will find new insights here too.'

Pete Wilcox, Bishop of Sheffield

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Part 1

WHAT IS GOING ON AND WHAT IS GOD DOING?

PART 1: WHAT IS GOING ON AND WHAT IS GOD DOING?

A Point in History

CUTTING EDGE COMMUNICATION

In the period of the Early Church the spread of the Gospel was enabled by the cutting edge technology of the day – the Roman road. In the providence of God this network of communication had been put into place just in time to enable Christians to travel the empire in speed and relative safety, spreading the news wherever they went. If Jesus had been born a few years earlier such rapid spread would not have been possible. The Early Church did not make use of their cutting edge technology entirely willingly. It took official steps to close them down to drive out the first Christians from their comfort zone, meeting with each other in the temple courts. Persecution propelled them in fear of their lives along the Roman roads to share the risen Christ with a pre-Christian world.

In the period of the Lockdown Church, the spread of the Gospel is being enabled by the cutting edge technology of the day – the internet. In the providence of God this network of communication has been put in place just in time to enable Christians electronically to travel the world in speed and relative safety. If the lockdown had happened just a few years earlier this rapid transition to an online church reaching the homes of the nation would simply not have been possible. The Lockdown Church is not making use of our cutting edge technology entirely willingly. It has taken official steps to close us down to drive us out of our comfort zone, meeting together in our church buildings. We have been propelled in fear of our lives along the internet highway to share the risen Christ with a post-Christian world.

Most of St Paul's roads had actually been there a few years before he walked them, but the early church also made use of the brand new codex technology – an innovative use of scrap notebooks to make sacred texts portable and shareable. Yes, St Paul had pressed the 'share' button long before Silicon Valley.

When persecution lifted, the Early Church did not abandon the Roman roads, public city spaces and codex sharing, reverting to a secret sect. When lockdown lifts, we must not abandon the public spaces of the internet highway and share buttons to hide away again in Sunday secrecy. We have been sent out like St Paul to welcome the world to the kingdom of Christ through sharing the technology of the day. What an opportunity!

WE'VE BEEN PROPELLED INTO THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Last month we were the Odeon, today we are Netflix. When I was young, the giant Odeon would show a film at 7.30 each night for a week or two. There was no choice of time, venue or film. If you wanted to see a film you had to turn up at 7.20pm, buy your popcorn and watch 'The Bridge on the River Kwai'.
In the 1950s the Odeon was okay. But then along came consumer choice, individualism and crowded, complex lifestyles. The big 'take it or leave' it screens started dying and multiplex arose, with its wide range of films and times. The surroundings were as comfortable as your own home. Then came TV film channels, and now Netflix, Prime and others, where you can watch whatever you want, whenever you want, wherever you are, on whatever you've got.

A few churches were ahead of the game – some have gone multiplex and a few have been trying Netflix – but typically, until last month, we were the 10.30am showing at St Odeon's.
Inadvertently, by going online for other reasons, church moved from Odeon to Netflix in a couple of weeks. People can now choose their own time to take part in the church service, which church and service to access, and their own sofa rather than contracting back pain on a church pew. No wonder it's more popular. The Government has shut our 'Odeons' down, so in response we have stumbled into 'Homespun Netflix' and it's looking promising.

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A Wonderful Discovery

Most churches going online have discovered that far more people are accessing their services than ever came to the building. What seemed initially to be a devastating blow to churches may actually generate growth.

God is a redeemer! Who knew?!

How Are Local Churches responding to lockdown?

Closing the churches took us by surprise. The alacrity of our response has been remarkable. Most churches have found ways of maintaining community connections, pastoral care and public worship. The Church of England, like other denominations, has traditionally counted the size of the church by physical attendance at church services. By this measure the C of E has ceased to exist. But church communities haven't shrunk – many seem to be growing in a new way. Church is people not buildings and our purpose hasn't changed – to worship God, to make disciples, to change the world. It's just the methods that have to adapt and we've discovered that we are more adaptable, and more appreciated, than we thought.

One archdeacon in the north of England wrote:

> 'Our clergy have been unbelievably wonderful in setting up at short notice their various acts of virtual worship. They are using Facebook, Zoom, Google Meet and YouTube for both live worship and pre-recorded stuff. This ranges from individual vicars doing things online to groups of churches and deaneries.'

Many churches and clergy who have taken to the public spaces of the internet to sustain their congregation find to their surprise that lots of other people appear to be joining in as well. Astonishing numbers of 'views' appear on our Facebook feeds and new or dimly remembered names appear in our comments boxes, like-lists and friends requests. Others are pre-recording their services as this is less stressful and more open to added elements, then releasing them at the normal Sunday morning time. However, they are then finding that extra people access the service later, at a time to suit them.

Clergy livestreaming daily prayers or the daily office are finding far more people joining them that they used to. Others are finding daily devotional posts being much appreciated.

Although we are focussing on worship-events here, these connect with all other aspects of church life. For example, one church in the Forest of Dean has been online fundraising and supporting the local foodbank they helped set up. Many locals did not realise it was a church initiative, but they do now. Another church, as a notice in the online services, offers food parcels to those stuck at home.

All this is happening without any official plan or direction – this is a grass roots movement. And that leads us to suspect it is a movement of the Holy Spirit.

However, denominational and diocesan leaders have not been inactive either. The Bishop of Carlisle livestreamed a Good Friday message to which, by Easter Monday, 938 people out of the thousands who viewed had engaged by commenting, sharing or reacting. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Easter Sunday livestream on Facebook has received over two million views.

So what is going on? Are we really reaching so many more people? And, if so, what should we do about it? How do we welcome our new virtual friends? And what does this discovery mean for church life after lockdown?

Some of you will shudder at all the techno stuff and new skills we suggest are needed, especially if the last few weeks have left you exhausted. But you don't have to do all of it. Or indeed more than a bit of it this week. It is amazing what a difference even simple changes can make. So read this prayerfully and ask God how you should respond within your and your church's or churches' capabilities. Yes, you should be stretched but no, you should not be broken.

And while we may see the mission opportunities, many of us are also grieving for what we have lost. We fear for some of our congregation. Will the less well-established lose touch and never be seen again? Will the older people be afraid of catching the virus after lock-down and stay away? A friend of mine from church is now on the palliative care route in his nursing home, bereft of his family, friends and rector. Many clergy are conducting desperate funerals without congregations.

Our attempt to help you with online mission is not a clarion call to over-activism, it's a resource to help you use your time effectively, to share lessons learnt, and to gather a team to share the load.

Does our upbeat tone surprise you? Our optimism is founded on God being a redeemer. He takes what is truly dreadful and makes good to come out of it. One of his redemptions is through the new connections and opportunities emergency online church is starting to bring alongside all the tragedy. Be encouraged.

Are Online Congregations Really Bigger?

We suspect they are. A lot bigger. This is what is so exciting.

But defining and logging 'attendance' at an online event is not easy!

Some comments and stories:

- Have had a huge number of hits, many more than the number of people in church on a Sunday. Connecting with people who would not come to a regular service. Comments such as, 'I'm not religious but that's fantastic', and 'see you on Sunday' (from non-church folk).

- Our online services on our YouTube channel, through Facebook, through our website, have doubled/nearly tripled Sunday morning numbers, about 200+ viewing for us. We will be looking at doing Live Sunday services in the future, and will get some internet into the Church building.

- Services have been really interesting – 250 people watching live, 1400 people watching a significant amount of the service in a week. 2500 people having a quick peek!

- Rediscover Church in Exeter has been broadcasting its morning service online for some time. The online part of the congregation tends to be around 100-150 people, and this includes some people who have never been to a church before. The church reasoned that many people today live their lives on the internet so that an online service is natural to them. But entering a church building is somewhat scary. The church has 'online pastors' to welcome online viewers and make them feel connected. They find that 80% of their newcomers had been watching online before they came in person. The online offering is not simply an alternative to personal attendance – it is the route in to personal attendance (with thanks to 'Christianity Today' April 2020)

- Here at Beacon Lough Baptist Church in Gateshead we have only 39 members but we started livestreaming our services six months ago and got about 200 views each week, rising to 300 the Sunday before lockdown. Now we pre-record our services on Facebook. The minister films his part with a video camera and drops a memory stick in my letterbox. Other people taking part (musicians, person with a four minute testimony) do the same and I do the links and put it together. It lasts about 45 minutes. I then upload it on to Facebook and YouTube on Saturday evening for it to go live at 10am Sunday. In the run up to Easter we advertised two of our three services to all 8400 Facebook users within 1km of our building. The advert cost us £5. We had 1300 views of each service. The 'control group' service we didn't advertise got the usual 300. We ask all church members to share the online service on their feeds – to like and share to build

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audience. We are getting a lot of feedback that people who were only loosely connected are watching and appreciating it. When lockdown began I started a Whatsapp group for all 48 houses in our street. Half the neighbours now seem to be accessing the service. Our minister is a Reservist Army Chaplain. When he goes in now the troops all ask him about the service as lots of them seem to watching it. The most important element in the service is sharing stories, testimony. That's what makes the most impact.

- We were amazed at the number of views we're getting, comments and likes from people I've never met. Our average Sunday attendance is 128. Church membership is approximately twice that, including faithful weekly attendees and those who come less often from the fringe, but are regular nevertheless. However our first Sunday morning livestream reached 647 with 203 engagements. Palm Sunday reached 951 with 259 engagements. I appreciate that some of these will be people dipping in but it's still significant.

- Here's a post from someone who responded after the first week.

  > 'I love this and the singing. I work at the hospital for NHS and I'm not able to attend church as often as I would like to as I have to work every weekend, unless I book holiday. Therefore I'm overwhelmed I can listen to services on here. I do try to attend evening services whenever I can as this church is where I did Sunday school as a little girl and has been my family church all my life for services also our family funerals and weddings. This is the only church I have ever attended and want to attend, therefore I'm so grateful to be able to listen to the services.'

  We've already commented that we are going to have to give serious consideration to livestreaming our worship once we get back to normal, whatever normal will look like in the future.

- I am writing this at 8.30am on Easter Monday. My own village church had two livestreamed services on the website Facebook page yesterday – a Messy Style at 9am and a more traditional service at 11am. The Messy-style was backed up by videos and posts largely created by the families themselves. Normally between 25 and 30 households totalling around 70 people come to the 9am service. The livestreaming was reportedly followed by 43 devices, probably representing around 100 individuals, being aimed at families. The number of church families taking part looked about average but new people revealed themselves through comments and likes. My best estimate is that the real-time 'Messy at Home' congregation was about 40% bigger than normal because of the new people. We think that several other families accessed the service and activities later.

  The 11am service had 73 devices. Being aimed at adults, people will have been watching in their ones and twos so the total number of individuals was probably around 110-120. This is roughly what we might have expected in church yet we know from the comments and likes that the total includes quite a few fringe and new people. I got a lovely email from a couple in Canada who watched it. So it is clear that some of our regular congregation were not connected, perhaps because they did not have the facilities at home. Some of our older and non-tech people were therefore unable to take part – a problem that did not affect the families at 9am, all of whom were tech-savvy enough.

  Some neighbouring village churches are not trying virtual services at all because most of their congregations are simply not equipped to receive them at home. Clearly we should not be so dazzled by the big 'views' figures that we become blind to those who are missing out completely. We have not found a replacement for meeting-together services, we have found an adjunct. We are not looking at an either-or future but at a both-and world.

- I found your 'Everybody Welcome' material really useful and we used it as part of our strategy, through which the church has grown considerably. We set up a Google Site for our online services. You can watch it at any time of day and numbers of logins suggest that more folk are accessing worship this way than actually attend on Sundays. We'll plan to livestream our church services online once this is over.

- A vicar in Suffolk is livestreaming his daily morning and evening prayer via the church website Facebook page. The number of people joining him has at least quadrupled and he never now says it on his own. A shortened form of daily prayer has been distributed via the parish magazine and a few people are saying it together over the phone. On his daily walk round the village he finds people more ready to talk than they used to be, and some are admitting to tuning in to the church services.

- A vicar in Sheffield podcasts daily Morning Prayer with his wife from their breakfast table with a five minute reflection. Six used to join him for this in church but now the website gets over 100 page views of this a day.

We'd love to hear your online story – do send us a summary if you have something helpful or encouraging to share with others.

Sparing you the details of how I did it, below is my careful estimate of the number of people who pretty fully accessed the online services at my (Bob's) own church the last three weeks. Most accessed at the appointed time, plus a few later. 2019 was of course a count of physical attendees, 2020 an estimate of online attendees:

Attendance at St Lawrence Eyam

	2019	2020	% Change
Palm Sunday	156	230	47%
Easter Sunday	221	310	40%
Low Sunday	98	150	53%

Are Online Visitors Really All Part of the Church?

Maybe some of them are just watching church out of boredom. More likely is some sort of felt need for community or yearning for God. We could have a fine ecclesiological debate about the boundaries of a church community, but most of us are used to them being vague, porous, open to the world. Here we are assuming that online joiners are all potentially journeying to join the Christian community. We do not want to judge motives or faith levels but we do want to echo God's giant cry of welcome to all who stumble towards him. For most people, it is belonging to the church that leads to believing in Jesus that leads to behaving as Christians. Those who find a warm welcome into the community of Jesus will soon meet its head.

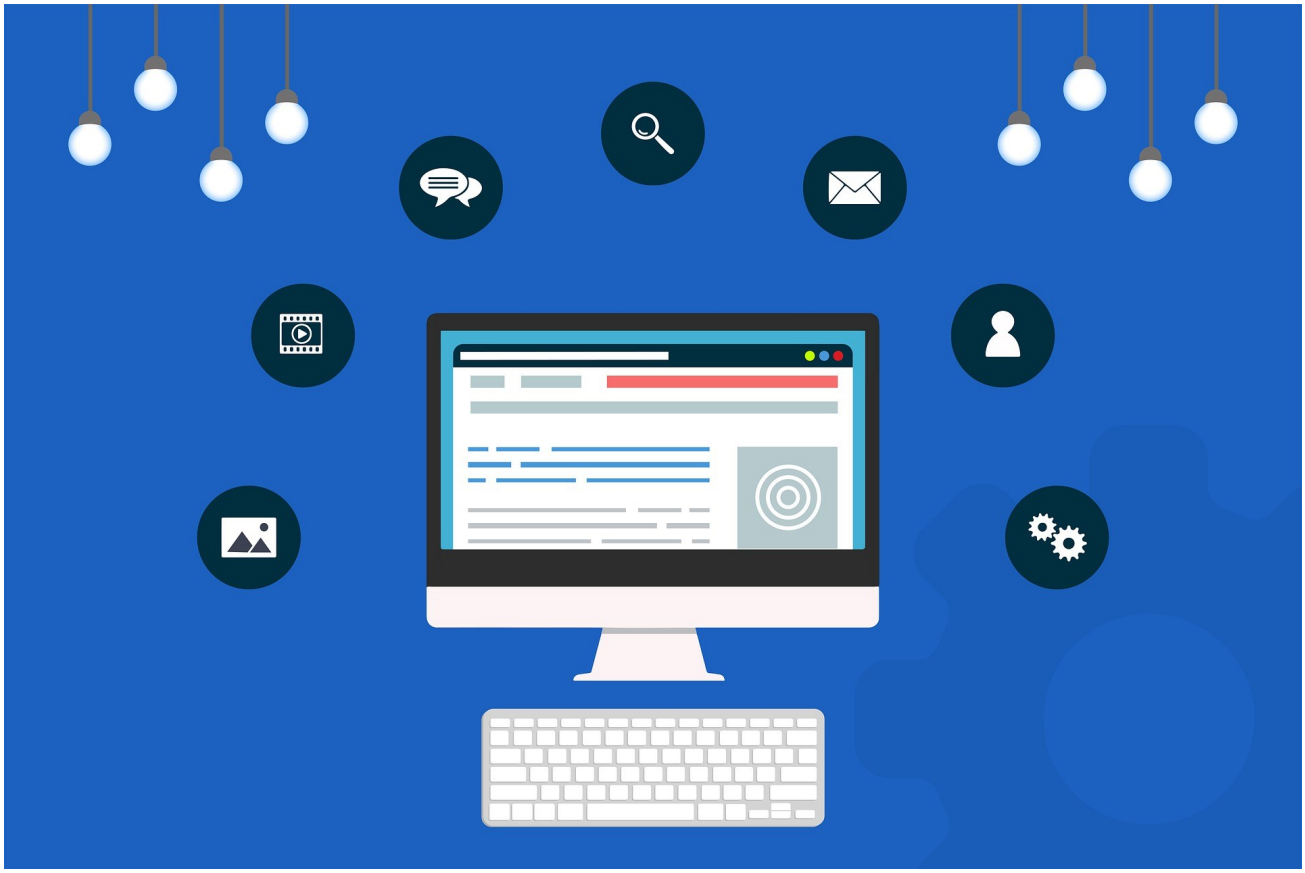
Interpreting 'Views' Figures

Some people have been bowled over by Facebook 'Views' figures, others say they are meaningless. We think they mean something, but not too much. Facebook includes as a 'view' all devices clicked on to the video for at least three seconds. A Facebook 'administrator' can find 'analytics' and click 'insights' and 'view more insights' to find data on live participants and subsequent views. This number can look huge, but for my church 56% of people gave up before 10 seconds and 82% before one minute. Only maybe 20-40 out of 900 watched most of the Easter Sunday service, though that in itself is a significant number and even the short-view crowd have at least come across us.

The problems are:

- Facebookers typically never watch anything for longer than five minutes, then usually with the sound turned off, and almost always on a phone. A 45 minute service is not in the Facebook culture. Long-form video is dominated by YouTube, Facebook only have a 1.2% market share.
- To catch and hold new people the opening seconds are critical. Facebook streamed services tend to begin with a tedious ten minutes of welcoming Fred and Mable who announce their arrival with a message. People do not patiently plough through all that to get to the meat of the service.
- You can't edit it later – what went out stays on!

I think I've cracked a method of estimating the number who do access the bulk of the service by viewing later on Facebook and you'll find that on our webpage.



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So Facebook is okay serving the live congregation – we get almost no drop off in our live congregation numbers. But it's not good for adding serious extras during the week. This is a large new potential mission field and you need the tool for the job – YouTube. But make sure your video welcomes and grabs people instantly it starts.

You can buy an advert on Facebook (they will advertise this service to you if you are an 'administrator'). They call it 'boost a post'. Silly name but it's cheap, and when the advert period is over they will send you, for free, helpful profiles of the people who saw the advert. These include, for example, age profile and gender split. You can restrict the area of advert to Facebook users in your own patch. You can advertise a YouTube link but only do it if you have a video that grabs instant attention.

YouTube: On YouTube Analytics you can discover how many viewers were watching you stream throughout your video. You can also find out how many messages were sent by viewers in your live chat.

Views figures clearly include large numbers of transient dippers-in. But that is no reason for dismissing them as worthless. A proportion will always stay the course and even the transient may stay longer next time. The few genuine viewers in the massive 'views' figures are the equivalent of the new person coming in through the church door or the returnee you haven't seen for five years. The Holy Spirit will certainly be at work touching their lives with love and grace through our online offerings. The stories and the data we have assembled together even at this early stage of online church tell us that genuine online congregations tend indeed to be significantly bigger than in the building.

Part 2

WHO IS RESPONDING AND WHY?

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PART 2: WHO IS RESPONDING AND WHY?

When someone has made a comment or pressed the like button on the Facebook platform you can go to their Facebook Profile by clicking on them, and so you find out something about them. Build up a picture by going through each person new to you in turn. Contact as many people as you can to say hello and how nice it was to see them connect with the church, ask how they are and how the church can help them. There may be so many people to follow up that you will need a team from the church to divide up the names between them.

We have analysed what we know of virtual newcomers to a few services and can see the following categories:

1. Friends and family of church members.
2. Local residents who don't normally come to church, or who used to come.
3. Housebound with a link to the church.
4. Linked by a past event (such as a baptism, wedding, funeral).
5. Used to come to the church, or grew up in it, but have moved away.
6. Occasional churchgoers who have now become regular.
7. Found the church via another (such as a denominational or diocesan) link.
8. Members of another church that is not livestreaming services.
9. No obvious connection but just seem to have joined in.

Examples:

1. Last Sunday I met a friend from church while out on our walks. She was in tears of joy because both her mother and her grown up daughter had responded to her suggestion, watched our livestreamed service and appreciated it. Neither would have countenanced going to a church building for a service.
2. Neighbours of ours who used to come to Messy Church when the children were smaller did the online service and activities, and posted lovely comments. It was as though they had never been away.
3. My friend's mum is too frail to go to church any more but she now joins our livestreaming every week. Church has re-found her. We're still trying to put in a wheelchair ramp at our church. Online is an excellent ramp.
4. I asked our rector about a name I did not recognise from our livestreamed Messy Church. He told me the man's baby daughter had been baptised in the church five years ago.
5. A young man who had grown up in our church, then married, moved away and lost touch with church joined in our Messy Church yesterday, together, I guess with his wife and their toddler.
6. One vicar writes: 'People who only ever turn up at Christingle seem to be watching each Sunday, a baptism couple who only attend once in a blue moon have commented that this has made them really miss church, one of our recent wedding couples have been watching and commenting.'
7. We registered our Messy-style service with a diocesan link and two families joined us through it.
8. We actually haven't identified anyone clearly in this category, we just suspect there may be a few.
9. There are just a few completely unfamiliar names who have revealed themselves through comments and likes, and we do not know their story.

We have detected the 'bored and worried', the 'how nice to be in touch this way' people and stressed NHS workers all accessing online.

The proportions in each category may well vary between churches but most people seem to be in categories 1-6 with a clear and established link with the church they have chosen. Implications:

1. Simply knowing the names of people joining in may well be enough to enable further contact.
2. The fear that a few large churches with slick online operations will scoop the market is largely unfounded. TV churches have existed for years. People are turning to churches they already know, with which they identify, often local to them. To hear the livestreamer say 'and welcome to John, Elsie's brother', is extremely powerful. People are being spatially distant but they do not want to be socially distant. By and large they are turning to their own church or to the nearest one. And they are turning with the full range of motives, needs and personalities, some looking for community, some for peace, some for God. We need the same sensitivity to individuals that we need on the church door.

3. The fact that most people joining in do so on the basis of a past link with physical church suggests that online church is not that easy to start up from scratch. It is, at the moment, largely dependent on traditional church. If it were easy to start and grow online church there would have been lots around for years now. In the long term, online church is likely to be an extension to the gathered community not a replacement for it.
4. Perhaps the fact that most newcomers may well have been invited by someone is the great new welcoming truth about online church. Our 'Everybody Welcome' training course spends much time on the problem that it is so difficult to invite people to come to church with us. Some Christians never ever invite, perhaps because of fear of rejection, or the embarrassment of it, or lack of confidence in their own church community's ability to welcome the stranger. I for one have invited more people to our online services in the last week than I have to physical church in the last ten years. So this is the great new discovery:

Inviting someone to access an online service is a thousand times easier than inviting them to attend a church building.

Why Are They Accessing Online Church?

Some of the reasons churches have come across:

1. These are unusual times, and people are looking for support, human contact, re-assurance, faith.
2. Many people also have more time on their hands.
3. It seems natural and easy to join online, while scary and unnatural to attend the building.
4. You can access online church without any commitment or anyone else knowing. You will not leave having been put on the flower rota.
5. Some are re-connecting with a community they have lost and miss, either through frailty or moving away.
6. You can access the service at a time to suit yourself – and many are doing so.
7. One previously non-churchgoer said that online she felt comfortable, fully part of the service and so more welcomed than if she had been in the building unsure of how to behave.
8. Most people are not looking for high-quality presentation and high-octane performance-religion. They are looking for a familiar and comforting voice and face. It is okay to keep it simple.
9. Some people find it easier to join a new group than an existing one. At online church at the moment everyone is new.
10. People are being invited to come to church in undreamed of, unprecedented numbers. It is the simplest thing to ask all congregation members on Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat to invite their online 'friends' to view the forthcoming church online service and send them a link. Even casual conversations over the phone with family and friends, or socially distanced chats on the street with neighbours, turn easily to invitation. Many people have up to now had no church of their own not because they don't want one but because they have never been asked. Now they have been.

One vicar says:

> 'My immediate reaction to virtual welcome is that online services are accessible, no strings attached, no-one to notice if you "get it wrong" and as such everyone can feel welcome, and able to be a full part of the service. I'm thinking especially of those who don't normally attend, only come when Grandma is staying, misfits, unsure seekers, and those on the periphery who don't receive communion. Online they can really feel part of the service, with all worry about inadequacy, uncertainty gone. Ministering in a small village church, it's obvious who doesn't come up for communion, who doesn't feel entirely part of the "set up", unsure if they belong. I am convinced Christ would have included the outsider, the seeker, the unsure.'

One vicar was stopped on her daily walk by a chap gardening who recognised her from posts and video – he said to keep going because he and his neighbours found them re-assuring and uplifting. She took his contact details and will try to grow the relationship.

We'd especially love to hear more stories of individuals connecting with online church as these develop everyone's human understanding of what is drawing people to church, God and faith at this time.

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Part 3

WELCOMING WELL IN THE LOCKDOWN CHURCH

PART 3: WELCOMING WELL IN THE LOCKDOWN CHURCH

Doing Online Church Well During Lockdown

The lockdown has opened up a mission imperative in an age of uncertainty when people are having their values challenged and being reminded of their mortality. Many are lonely, afraid and bored. Others are over-worked and desperate for support. How can we make the most of the kit available, engage our own welcoming instincts, relate well online, put together newcomer-friendly worship and follow up those who reach out to us?

You can google 'online church' or 'Images of online church' and a whole world of wonders will explode on to your screen. We don't aspire to replicate that but to assemble practical wisdom for ordinary churches, learnt the hard way in the early weeks of lockdown church, and to start a learning community from which we can all benefit.

People are not turning to us for chummy chat and whizz kid tech but to find God and the numinous, to make sense of lives turned upside down. Encounter with the living God is the true test of quality and the reason they will return.

Safeguarding and Online Safety

Be mindful of the safeguarding implications of moving church services, home groups, personal contact and youth work online. Normal safeguarding processes should still apply. Your church safeguarding officer should be involved in planning and risk assessments. Those offering pastoral care online on behalf of the church should have been trained and authorised. Be as alert as usual to potential issues with those joining you online or on Zoom. The Church of England website provides advice for using video conferencing for youth work and signposts you to 'Creating safer spaces online' produced by Youthscape. Anglicans should contact their Diocesan Safeguarding Team with concerns or questions, and other denominations will have similar arrangements.

Platforms

Most churches we have come across are using one of three platforms – Zoom, Facebook and YouTube. Some especially younger churches use Instagram. They are all free and accessible to most people. For example, you do not have to be on Facebook yourself to access a Website Facebook page, but you won't be able to use the comments box. The other main choice is whether to pre-record or livestream.

Other platforms include Vimeo and churchonlineplatform.com as well as various options you can purchase.

In the early lockdown weeks, people have been grateful for whatever clergy and churches have been able to do, very forgiving of technical hitches and limited formats. In fact,

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homespun has been better than slick. But, as the weeks roll by, the aim should be to get a little bit better at this each time, raising both the technical and content quality of what goes out. If they can't hear it properly, the camera wobbles and the same person each week is beginning to run out of ideas, people will start dropping off. So focus on improving quality and recruit anyone who can help you do this. It will be a team effort not a solo performance. But try not to turn into a tele-evangelist! Stay rooted, human, caring, local.

Zoom

Zoom is being used effectively for a lot of internal church meetings but some also use it for live services. The App is easy to load. The big problem is that you have to be invited and given a code in order to join the meeting, so it feels more like an insiders' club – everything we are trying to get away from as we open ourselves up to the online world. Entry level Zoom is free but if you want meetings to last over 40 minutes and some other features someone will have to pay. The screen can take up to 100 devices, but it is possible to arrange an extension to go bigger. You may think 100 faces on a TV screen will all be exceedingly small but you can scroll up and down smaller numbers at any one time. There is a danger of talking across each other so the host has to keep firm control, but that is also true of church in person. And you can actually see each other and exchange some conversation.

Nevertheless, plenty of smaller and medium sized churches are using Zoom happily.

Zoom can in fact be recorded then put on YouTube or Facebook for later viewing, though of course the later viewer can't join the discussion or have their face painted in retrospectively!

When scheduling a regular zoom meeting set it as recurring and choose the option 'no fixed time'. That way the link remains the same from week to week.

One church publicises the Zoom service on Facebook and the church website and invites people to click and request a link to participate in the service. The vicar then welcomes each person who joins the service taking special care with newcomers. At the end the vicar again goes round all the participants and they report that it feels like quite a community has formed, also inviting people to a virtual 'tea with the vicar' for a further chat. It is very easy to disrupt a zoom service, and it is not really suited to services where there are children present. But we have heard no horror stories yet. To ensure personal attention, as numbers grow some churches may need to multiply their number of Zoom services. Some of these may then be able to continue after Lockdown.

A vicar in Sheffield puts it like this:

> 'We are using zoom for online worship. The hyperlink to join is made available on our web site. Invitations are sent out through our electronic database. We are finding that people join us who are very much on the fringe of our church, who are rarely seen on a Sunday (Christmas/Easter visitors usually) and we have had some who we don't know at all.
>
> Joining zoom gives a much greater feel of fellowship than any other livestreaming experience, and this allows the possibility of actually talking to the visitor (admittedly, not easy when you don't know who they are and everyone can hear the conversation). The numbers will never compete with Facebook connectivity but it may be that one zoom link is worth 50 Facebook glances!'

Facebook and YouTube

These two platforms are the key if you are looking for accessibility and the option for people to post comments, and they are both easy to set up. Some churches are using both so they can reach more people. One key advantage with YouTube is that people can watch it on any Smart TV which means it is much easier to view, especially for a household, and there are fewer problems with volume thereby enabling people to sing along. Another key advantage is that it is easily searchable in all search engines whereas Facebook videos do not pop up in them. Many churches publish their services on both, as well as putting them on their website. A detailed comparison can be found at www.epiphan.com/blog/youtube-or-facebook/.

If you are putting posts, photos and videos on your website Facebook page you should ideally learn how to delete the old ones, otherwise people will not be able to find the current needles in the Facebook haystack. This apparently is possible but not easy. Go to the Facebook Help Centre for direction. If you crack this one and can explain the click sequence could you let us know?

You can find out quite a lot about people joining a Facebook service if you ask everyone to enter a comment at the start and make responses as the service continues and click on 'like' or 'love'. You can then interact with them and also look at their Facebook profiles.

Having a live host enables repartee and welcome as people log in, and finding a household with lots of people in it can help. Our Easter Sunday Messy-Style service at Eyam was hosted by a family of six.

During Lockdown simple 'livestreaming' is often only one person giving a talk to camera. Some churches have started this way but are quickly looking for how to enrich the content and format. There is a piece of free software called 'OBS' (Open Broadcast Software) you can download to any computer. This operates with Facebook and allows you to set up a series of 'scenes' for your livestreamed service. Scenes could be still photos or video. You can mix a soundtrack from the church organist with people singing the hymn.

Churches who pre-record their services can 'premier' them on YouTube or Facebook. This means it is set for a particular time so that you can advertise your service to your congregation and more widely. A step by step beginner's guide to 'premiering' your service for free using Facebook and YouTube is available at www.churchofengland.org.

If premiering on YouTube, the chat opens 30 mins before it goes live. One church put out the question 'Who could you invite to join us this morning in the next few minutes?' A great way to encourage people to invite their friends.

Perhaps the ideal, if you can manage the technology, is to have well prepared and presented video to mix with livestreaming and then be left on YouTube. The best of both worlds.

Instagram

Instagram is the best, most commonly used, platform to use for connecting with Youth and Young Adults. Every action, other than private messages, is completely public. Instagram users can post either main feed posts or Instagram stories. Stories disappear after 24 hours and tend to be more informal. Similarly to Facebook, Instagram allows you to do livestreams, the advantage of Instagram being that you can invite another person to join the livestream which allows for more interaction. Through a livestream, a church or youth group may host Q & A, bible studies and games such as Pictionary or a quiz. Like Facebook, people can comment in a live chat. Instagram's IGTV allows users to upload videos of up to 10 minutes in length which appear in the Instagram feed of those who follow the account. This is a helpful way of producing content for young people without needing to direct them to a YouTube channel. A series of bite sized IGTV teaching/worship/interview videos may be better than a big indigestible 45 minutes meal of a church service.

Bad News – It's Babel Out There

Some people communicate by parish magazine, landline and garden fence. Others by email, website and Facebook. Then there is the Instagram, Tik Tok and Snapchat generation. Churches should try to serve everyone, so ideally should be multi-lingual communicators. Use as many languages as you can. Larger churches need a comms team.

Good News – Even Limited Expertise Works

Churches are exploring what content to use and this partly depends on what expertise and facilities they have. Here are some typical comments we have received from church leaders:

> A simple shortened service, not trying to replicate what we do in church, though still containing the heart of it – actually 'repackaging' the heart of it – is both exciting and creative and more work than it looks. Not worrying about being slick in any way – home-made authenticity seems most powerful.
>
> I've been recording and mixing on iMovie. I brought in music from my Musical Director, got readers and so on from church via Zoom. This meant that all the services are just like your normal Sunday service. If people then come to the physical church it will be what they are used to from the virtual.
>
> Vary the visual content, so that people aren't looking at the Vicar for the whole of a service, with appropriate pictures, music, members of the community reading lessons, intercessions and so on. Have the words for hymns, responses etc. scrolling along the bottom of the screen. Check for inappropriate material in the background.
>
> The different parts of the service, songs, prayers, bible readings, talk and so on are recorded by people who usually do these on a regular Sunday. We find this keeps some continuity for viewers/congregation and for those taking part. Helpful instructions are given such as recording in a quiet space, using something to stand your phone or camera on and most of all smile. I think

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it should definitely be a team effort, the church is more than one or two, and everyone should be involved where they can. All the services are all age as well rather than the once or twice month that they ran in church so as to engage the children whilst Children's Church and crèche are not available.

Welcome People to the Church, Not a TV Programme

We can't be so taken up communicating with new people that we ignore the existing church community, who will look for echoes of familiarity, reassurance, community. But most of all we seek God, a new truth for a new age from the Scripture, wine outpoured, deep prayer, spiritual strength for the week ahead. The core task is do our best for the people we know. And there is no harm in letting people see how we love one another and so want to share in that love.

But sharing God at spiritual depth is also what will attract and feed others. Newcomers should experience the church as it really is. Yes there need to be plenty of packaging-adaptations both to being online and to having a much wider group of people accessing the service. The list of good practices below is geared towards welcoming the newcomer. But that has to be within the context of the character of the existing church community and the way it worships.

God is the great welcomer. The Holy Trinity – that perfect community of love – beckons us to join in and is prepared for all the change that brings. The community of Christ has been welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. That community must for ever be looking out to welcome others. The ideal online welcome is therefore made by the church community, not just a livestreamer. Spread around the church community the job of following up the people identified online. We can't knock on their doors at the moment but most people can phone or contact on social media and make a new friend. Don't get swamped – mobilise the community of welcome, give them one contact each. 'Hello, I'm calling on behalf of the church to say how lovely it was to see you at online church yesterday'.

Some in your church will be energised by all the new action, like people were in 'The War'. But others – contemplatives, introverts, technophobes – will get stressed out by it all. Not everyone needs to become a Zoom expert, leave some people in relative peace. You are nurturing people along a marathon not a sprint.

Some Good Practice Suggestions

The early weeks of going online have been a hand-to-mouth existence for many of us. But now is the time to take stock, pull together a planning and operations team, and get organised. Spread the work around and use other people's skill sets. For example, ask someone methodical to keep a log of whatever statistics your platform throws up. This will be the equivalent of your service register and show up the numbers trend and

the impact of any advertising. Below is a list of good practice suggestions to check out:

1. Don't look at the centre of your iPad/laptop screen or whatever you are using. Make eye contact with the camera lens shown by the light.
2. Involve your whole church community in spreading news of the online service and how to access it by social and traditional media and word of mouth.
3. Whichever platform you use, promote your service on other platforms. Try a local Facebook ad but keep the area small so you are not annoying other churches and competing with their adverts.
4. You can email out readings and liturgy so that people can join in at home, and also put this on the website and draw peoples' attention to this at the start of the service.
5. At the start and end of every service specifically mention and welcome visitors and newcomers as valued members of this new community. For a good example of how to welcome onliners look at a service on the website of St Paul's Dorking. The welcome includes practical offers of support from the church congregation, such as food parcels, together with an email address and a phone number for people to contact the church during the service. People are manning a laptop for the emails and a phone for the messages to respond as the service proceeds.

   Here is some sample wording:

   Wording at the start of livestreaming
   Welcome everyone. I'd especially like to welcome anyone new or who has not been a regular member of our church in the past. I hope you feel fully part of this online worshipping community today and that you find you can meet with God through the service.

   Wording at the end of livestreaming
   That's the end of our livestreamed service this week. But I'd just like to say that, if you are new to St George's, you are especially welcome. We'll be here at the same time next Sunday. In the meantime I would love to hear from you by email. I'd especially love to know how you came to join our service today and whether we can help you further on your spiritual journey in these unusual times. Just drop a brief email to bobthevic@gmail.com and we will respond to you.

6. Make multiple references to your physical location – eventually you hope people will find you in person.
7. Use 'online hosts' on your YouTube feed to welcome and engage with people on the chat function
8. Some churches are finding that people are not engaging well with sung worship by singing in their own homes. Reduce the number of songs to one or two - or show a good performance item.
9. With pre-recorded services you can still use Facebook at the end of the designated service time to chat and engage with people – it's the handshake on the way out.
10. Make the online service as responsive as possible:
    - Responsive prayers with the response words on the screen.
    - Invite people to have a Bible with them to follow the reading and talk, though you can always put up the words as you read the passage.
    - Use silence.
    - Invite people to write their own prayers in the message box so everyone can see them floating up the screen. Encourage likes and so on.
    - Invite people to contact your team there and then – have a team of welcomers manning an email address or a phone for messages and responding immediately.
11. Timing: it is rare for people to watch a platform for more than 30-40 minutes. So you may want to shorten your online service and it is essential to get across your welcome and message immediately you begin. Target the opening at newbies and visitors. Give them a way of saying hello – such as a comments box if on Facebook. And summarise your message of hope in troubled times.
12. Have people on hand to respond to comments that come in, looking out especially for visitors. Personal contact is key - when a guest pops up on the Facebook comments stream it may be possible to link them with someone they already know. Envision church members for friendship evangelism. Offer a website for people to email. But let them be in charge of their own process. Treat them as individuals and don't try to corral them down some rigid route you have invented. But have in mind the sort of second steps that are practical in your situation. Be ready with an online Zoom Alpha Course.

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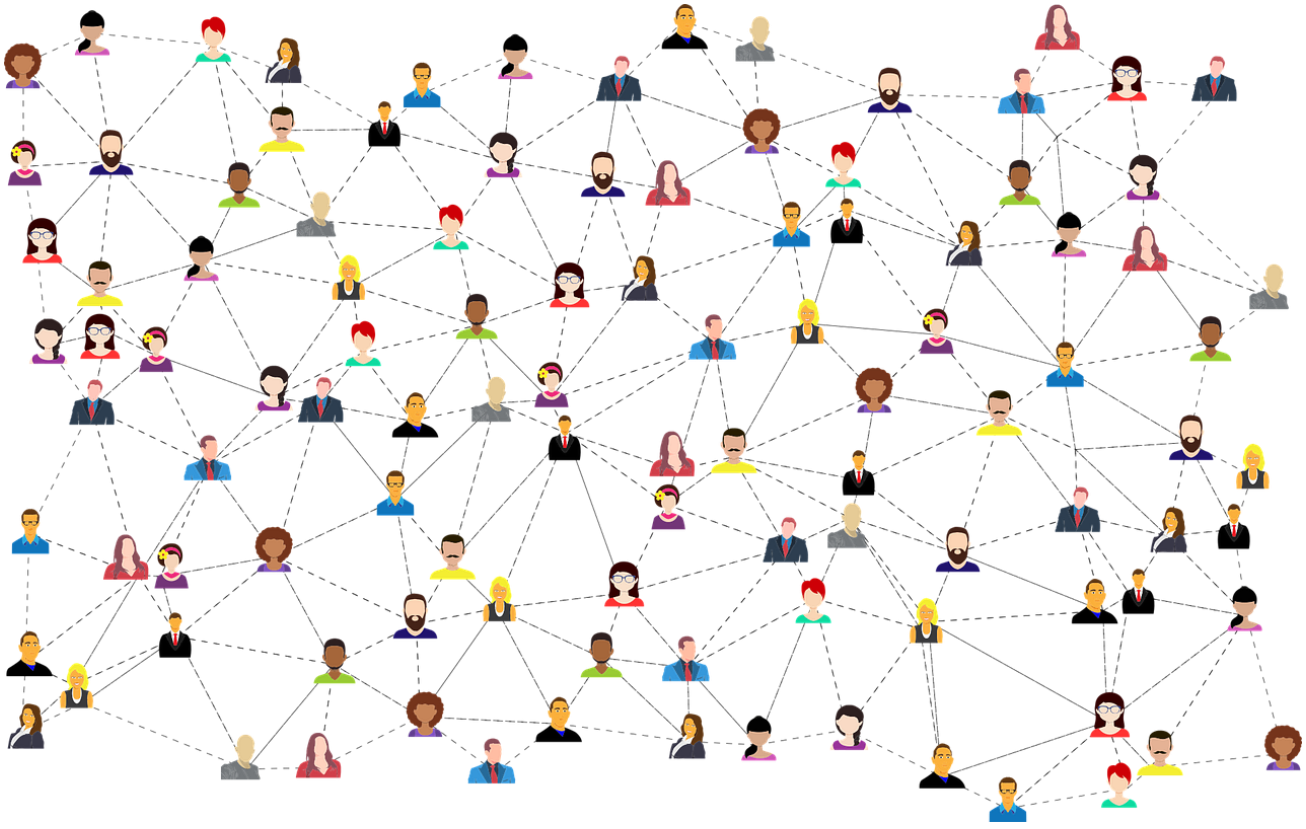
13. It is vital if someone contacts you that you make a first response within 24 hours. You will probably need to get a team up and running for this sort of thing. Don't try to do everything yourself. Someone should be keeping a log of the names of people who have contacted you online and the type of contact. This will help you respond to people appropriately and not forget someone.
14. Keep the language seeker-friendly, don't exclude people with insider lingo. Ask people in your congregation to spot your language barrier phrases and tell you.
15. Be sensitive to the presence of a wide range of people when presenting the service and cut out the jargon. One minister wrote: 'Our Easter service has already had over 1100 views on YouTube so we know people are watching. That has influenced how we preach and what we preach on – shorter messages and very gospel/Jesus focussed.'
16. It may be that the most powerful content at the moment (isn't it always?) is stories. Get people to tell their story or testimony and include one in an online service. The person will need to script it and practice at home to record on their device. It should be short (two to four minutes), real and recent and be about an experience of God in their lives.
17. Or try 'sofa talks' – a Zoom interview from two sofas in two houses on a relevant subject such as 'how do we deal with worry?' Record separately in the two homes then stitch together. Incorporate into the streamed service and use it as a stand-alone YouTube video.
18. At the end encourage people to 'like' the service and share it. That is one way it will ripple out through the local community over the coming week.
19. Always tell people how they can take a next step if they wish to – otherwise you are implying they are very welcome to watch but you have no further interest in them after that. A next step will almost inevitably mean them revealing themselves to you. That should be their unpressurised decision but it is the key that unlocks everything else. Offer an introductory course like Alpha or START you can do on Zoom.
20. Blessing people properly is particularly powerful and needed at the moment. Make it an important element of the service. It may be the last time someone is blessed or prayed with before they go to hospital and die in isolation.
21. Explore using Zoom for after-church coffee and invite people to join in. If you are a large church you may need several Zoom rooms. A Zoom organiser might split people up so they have to talk to people other than their immediate friends.
22. Look at Insights on Facebook and Analytics on YouTube to see what is happening during your stream. Zero-in on retention metrics. Don't get wrapped up in how many people viewed your content, but how long they watched for, and how many people engaged during the service.
23. If you are a Church of England church, 'A Church Near You' shows which churches are livestreaming so make sure you inform them.
24. Some churches record a CD of the service for those not able to access the internet and send it out to them. In some cases others in the household who do not normally attend church might join in.
25. People read the comments. Encourage church members to have conversations in the comments section about the material and their reactions. Encourage the church to have public conversations about their everyday faith and



reactions to content in the comments section. People will and do read that stuff! In fact they are probably more interested in what everyone else is saying than what the pastor in the video is saying.

26. Have people monitor old posts. Stuff still gets viewed after the event. Pick up 'late' likes and comments.
27. You can offer an invitation to something 'face-to-face' once normal socialising is permitted. 'If you enjoyed the online service today, why not try coming to St Bob's when our services resume? We'd love to welcome you in person.' Or, when a date for resuming socialising is known you could invite new online worshippers to a gentle social event to meet you and each other.
28. Ensure that you have the copyright permission you need if you are using music. Your existing licences may be sufficient but details are at: www.rscm.org.uk. Further details from CCLI can be found at: uk.ccli.com. You cannot broadcast YouTube songs you happen to find as that is breach of copyright and Facebook will put a stop to it. So find ways to make, record and broadcast you own music.
29. Other useful links:
    - ChurchEdit.
    - Love Black Country.
    - This is a really useful link to: 'Community in a Crisis - relational sustainable online church'.

Here are four examples of what churches are doing:

a. We're livestreaming Sunday morning on Facebook. We go live ten minutes before service starts, and I keep an eye on comments stream and say hi to people on the livestream as they join – including newcomers/folk from distance. I also encourage people to say hi on the comments. At the end we have a few Zoom rooms open after the stream – one for general chat, one for kids, and one for newcomers or people who want to know more, although we haven't actually had anyone come to this yet. We're working on a virtual equivalent of our welcome/address capture card.
b. We have been livestreaming pre-recorded services on Facebook and YouTube, and have noticed how important the comments section can be for creating a sense of interaction. In particular, we have tried to make sure those who aren't regular members are noticed and acknowledged. This may be a more general comment 'Welcome everybody, and a special welcome to anyone who is joining us for the first time', or if we have some vague connection we might welcome them by name. We have also tried to make sure we interact with any comments visitors make during the service, even if this is just the 'like' button. Before each livestream begins we decide who is posting as 'St Matthew's' and then the rest of the team post as themselves - this helps people to know that they're engaging with a whole community rather than an anonymous organisation.
c. We are livestreaming services, using OBS (Open Broadcaster Software) via Facebook live, so that it is accessible to all. Facebook saves the streamed service as video, but we also up-load the video to YouTube for extra accessibility. We do not specifically single out our newcomers. We welcome everyone, sometimes by name as they join the stream. We post a screen at the beginning with details of all our streamed services as a general invitation, and another at the end with contact information. We end the stream with a short spoken repeat of all that information (service times and contact information), as well as another general invitation to get in touch. Most are returning regularly and commenting via the comments bar on Facebook. We respond to the comments, thereby engaging individually. We are finding this works well, and feels less segregated than specifically mentioning newcomers – the new community is building organically without divisions; in a sense everyone is new, because the method of meeting is new.
d. I began Zoom Sunday services. These have been well received and I have enjoyed leading them. We have had guests from across the country as well as members of the congregation from across the benefice. The services have been advertised: in parish newsletters, on Facebook and word of mouth. The Zoom services are surprisingly spiritual and ministerially rewarding. Online services and electronic media is not my comfort zone, I have had to learn new things very quickly but I believe it is necessary at this time. I have been pleased with how well it is going. To be honest I have had more compliments on my ministry in the last three weeks of lockdown that I have had in the three years of incumbency. That may be a little sad but it shows that something is working.

Websites

We guess that many churches have just discovered their website is not fit for purpose. At the very least you should be able to add and delete content yourselves. If not, take urgent steps to acquire this ability. A good website is not a notice board but a portal through which the visitor can beam

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themselves up to meet you. One church has a button to press so you can arrange a Zoom meeting with the Alpha organiser. It should be a route to online services, to a FaceTime chat with the vicar, or whatever routes are appropriate for you.

Make sure that up front and central on your website home-page is a warm welcome to the casual browser who may possibly access an online service or some other offering. Online service information should be near the top of the homepage. Minimise the number of clicks needed to access material. Here is a sample wording:

> **Welcome to everyone – a message from our vicar**
> Our church services haven't stopped just because the building has closed. We have gone online so it is really easy to find us on Sunday morning at 10. Click the Facebook link below and you are in. You don't need to be on Facebook yourself.
>
> And if you have been accessing our livestreamed services, or simply looking at our website, welcome! Perhaps you find church online easier to try out than a physical building, perhaps these extraordinary times have triggered something spiritually inside you, perhaps you would appreciate linking with a Christian community. If, for whatever reason, you would appreciate some human contact with our church, or have a question, then please email me at bobthevic@gmail.com and we will respond to you.

Does Online Preclude Contemporary Styles of Worship?

It does seem relatively easy for a vicar to livestream a service, doing everything themselves in the old-fashioned way. Much harder to replicate a service with many people contributing or a families' worship event like Messy Church or one with inspiring music. However, with ingenuity there is always a way. The music group leader at my son's church laid down their own instrument track at home then sent it round the other members in turn to film their track. The band was then put together and led singing for the streamed service. This is a wonderful opportunity to get tech-savvy families to produce inspiring home-videos and to ask others to host the livestreaming or make contributions on phone videos. In my church it was the children by video who conveyed the Easter story most memorably and attractively. We should build on that when lockdown ends.

Lucy Moore, the founder of Messy Church, at first thought that most Messy Churches would sit out the lockdown and resume when it was over. However large numbers have been determined to keep going with regular craft suggestions and Bible verses being sent round their families, and pastoral phone calls to see if they are okay. Some, like our own, have kept their events going with a mix of posts, video and livestreaming. A Baptist Church in Doncaster distributed 'Messy Church in a Bag' to 400 homes.

Messy Church are adjusting their online resources to fit the new situation. The run up to Easter gave the churches obvious activities and an extra motive. Post Easter is a new challenge.

Some youth groups have gone Zoom, others are posting alternatives to standard worship, such as interviews, that are more natural online. A few churches, such as HTB, are offering specialist youth worship that all can access. Youth for Christ have made some good materials available. Instagram is likely to be the preferred platform.

Messy Church at BRF has committed to providing an outline session each week for families to do Messy Church at home until at least the end of June, available free from www.messychurch.org.uk.

Part 4

WELCOMING THE CROWDS WHEN LOCKDOWN IS OVER

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PART 4: WELCOMING THE CROWDS WHEN LOCKDOWN IS OVER

Many of the church ministers we have consulted have told us the experience of lockdown will change their church for ever. One free-church minister in West Sussex wrote: 'The situation is forcing us to ask questions we have not asked before. It will change how we do church whenever this lockdown is over.' A vicar in Derbyshire said, 'I've known for some time that we should have been online but we did nothing about it. Now I know we have to stay online when this is all over.'

So do not imagine that when the lockdown ends you can 'return to normal'. The emergency is forcing us to gaze in through a massive mission-window we hadn't realised was more than a tiny slit. When people get busy again they might be slightly less inclined to take in a church service. But we hope that, from now on, many churches will always have an online presence and that services will always be livestreamed in some way or other. Setting up good online welcoming practices should be not a temporary expedient but a permanent mission-advance. There might also be a wave of new people turning up in person when churches re-open because they have so appreciated the online version.

Resources

Find helpful information on streaming services online at:

- This is a 17 minute video on how to physically equip your church building to livestream.
- A step-by-step beginner's guide to going live with your service or event using YouTube, Facebook and Instagram.
- The Church of England provides webinars on streaming which you can book into here.

Timing

Livestreaming for lockdown may last a while:

1. When lockdown ends some people may be too frightened to attend church in person.
2. The pandemic may go in waves so lockdowns could be re-imposed for periods several times over the next year or two
3. Mrs Merkel announced on April 15 that unlocking in Germany will gradually start in early May with small shops, hairdressers and schools re-opening. However, large public gatherings and religious services will remain banned until August 31st. Germany is ahead of the UK. If Germany is anything to go by, do not expect your church building to re-open for worship until at least September. Every church should now set up an online presence if it does not wish to suffer the impact of being closed for at least six months. Some churches, after such a hibernation, may never reopen at all.
4. Suppose, on 'Unlock Sunday' your building is not yet equipped, do you simply tell your new onliners they can come to the building if they wish, otherwise you have no further interest in them? Far better to maintain a stopgap online-only offering until the building is equipped.

So keep learning and honing the skills, don't imagine they will be redundant for ever in a few weeks' time. If you have been wavering about whether to do online services because it might soon be over then think again. And start planning for the new era of livestreaming when churches do eventually reopen.

Make 'Unlock Sunday' the greatest 'welcome to church' day ever and the start of a new era.

Strategic Options

The main option choices for the long term would appear to be:

1. **Just try to keep congregations ticking over until we can get back to normal in our buildings.** Please don't think like this!
2. **Invite online contacts to further explore the faith with online steps such as an enquirers' course.** Well worth a try. Pencil in an enquirers' course to start when lockdown ends even if you have one during lockdown. There may be all sorts of people, not just online visitors, who have developed a need and desire for this through their lockdown experience. Advertise it during online events and on the website and offer to conduct it using Zoom. If they opt for face to face then fine, but offer the option. St Chad's Romiley have already advertised an online Alpha in the online services and are about to start it with at least eight participants.
3. **Make better contacts with the wider fringe and encourage some to join in the physical gathered community that is 'proper' church.** Experience says that online is an excellent stepping-stone to 'in person' – so encourage people in that direction. But this won't work for all so you have to retain online presence.
4. **Set up a separate online congregation alongside the gathered ones**. We would like to find out whether this would work but have our doubts. If permanent online-only

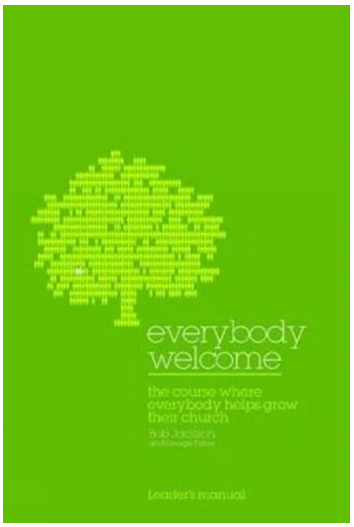
church were easily viable we would have lots of them already. Can the intrinsic human need for community and belonging be fully satisfied for ever in virtual space? When lockdown ends, the instinct to gather may be stronger than ever. Adding a dedicated online service would involve a lot of extra effort compared with simply filming what happens in church anyway.

5. **Livestream regular services in order to include people who can't or won't be part of a gathered congregation.** This is going to be a natural outcome for many churches. Those contacted through the lockdown weeks – plus others – can be offered the chance to view existing services in the church building when they re-start. This may work very well for many people, including those physically unable to attend or who live in care homes or those for whom a physical visit to church is a bit too stressful to contemplate. It may work for many younger people, including those whose partners would disapprove of a physical visit to church. This is worth doing even if the online participants are simply silent individuals watching a gathered community without being part of it. But leaving it at that will miss most of the benefit.
6. **Use interactive livestreaming to grow a blended, fluid online-in-person church community.** We think this is usually the best option. An online pastor offers welcome and some commentary as people log on and say hello through the comments box. The onliners could join after church refreshments in a Zoom room. They would be invited to small groups and other dimensions of church life. Some people would come in person one week and be online the next. Shift and Sunday workers could catch up on a different day. The average churchgoer pre-lockdown attended the service only one week in two. Having the service available online all week might greatly increase frequency rates and even enable a revival of sequential preaching. Friendship-welcome would be offered to all online and in person newcomers equally. This is not a model of participants and spectators but of a single, complex, fluid, open community.
7. **Vary the format on different weeks.** The 9am 'Early Church' for families at Eyam currently meets twice a month. During lockdown it has gone online, attracted extra people and enabled families to do much of the ministry and leadership. When lockdown ends the twice a month in-person services will probably resume without any filming. But in a third week we may well continue the online 'home' style that is proving popular at the moment, blending in person and online in one community by week of the month.

Get Prepared

1. **Technology and kit.** Churches should be preparing the technology for this now as a matter of urgency. We foresee a massive business opportunity for anyone able to offer a one-stop shop to equip churches for livestreaming their events and services. However, there may be such a scramble to get set up when lockdown ends that the waiting list for kit and people to fit it will be horrendously long. Wise churches will research what they need and buy the kit now as a matter of urgency, then fit it as soon as they regain access to their buildings. Ideally there should be not a week lost between lockdown ending and livestreaming of a church service beginning. There will be all sorts of other benefits and uses of good kit once you have it. For example, the minister could record introductions to home-group sessions. Our church gets a lot of visitors so we could have a screen showing last Sunday's worship for visitors to dip into.
2. **Skills and training.** A whole new set of technical skills has become needed for the good and growth of the church. Every church should seek out people among its friends, fringe or members who have the skills needed. Gaps should be plugged by finding training opportunities for people to acquire the needed skills. **We would love those possessing good level technical knowledge and skills for online church who can share this with others to let us know and we'll put your contact details up on our site.**
3. **Welcome and relationships.** Imagine the scene on the first Sunday your church is allowed to open. Those regulars brave enough to start meeting other people will be overjoyed to see each other again and in many churches there will be much hugging and rejoicing. In others, people may even smile at each other momentarily. However, disconcertingly, there are also a number of strangers who have turned up. These are people who had been accessing the services online during lockdown – and they actually already think of themselves as belonging to the church community even if they haven't been in the flesh before. But the regulars ignore them in their delight at old friends so the newcomers leave disappointed and disillusioned. If you think this may be a plausible scenario in your church then prepare your congregation for this key event. Appoint some to look out for strangers, to talk to them and integrate them into what is happening. Acknowledge newcomers from the front and get their names and contact details so you know which of your onliners is there and can continue developing the relationship. And we know the perfect training course for your congregation – Everybody Welcome (Leaders Manual, Members manual and DVD) written by the two of us!

Available from Church House Publishing.



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Part 5

LEARNING TOGETHER

PART 5: LEARNING TOGETHER

1. Pass the Word

If you have found the Everybody Welcome units useful or inspiring then pass them around to everyone you know, make them go viral. Use email to send them or use social media to recommend the site.

2. Send in your Stories and Lessons from Experience

We will post church stories of going online, and lessons learnt, on our web page and use them to revise these notes to help everyone learn from you.

3. Send us Some Stories of Individuals

We would love to accumulate stories of how people have started to access church online and how they have responded. None of us will understand what's going on unless we hear the real human stories.

4. Help us with Testing

Until there is large scale testing we cannot know key facts about the C19 virus, which handicaps the effort to beat it. Our efforts to grow online church will be similarly handicapped if we don't know what is going on. Many churches are reaching people online, but others won't be. Where is the balance? The easiest way to shed light on what is going on is comprehensive surveys in small areas. 'Churches Together in X' or the 'Deanery Chapter of Y' or the 'Z Circuit' would ask all churches in their area to fill out a very short questionnaire we will provide and send the results in to us. We will analyse and share the results. When results are in from several areas or groups we will have a pretty good idea of the patterns of response and new insights into which responses seem to be working best.

Just drop us an email and we will supply the questionnaire and all you need to conduct your survey. Then send us the filled-in forms and we will analyse and report.

5. Offer your Expertise

We're good on books and people but not so good on tech, devices and social media. Let us know if you can offer good relevant expertise to improve our offerings. Or if you may be available to help churches sort out their tech issues.

We'd especially love to hear more stories of individuals connecting with online church as these develop everyone's human understanding of what is drawing people to church, God and faith at this time.

THE VEN BOB JACKSON AND THE REV GEORGE FISHER
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For inspiration and ideas on leading well, sign up for CPAS' free monthly leadership email, Lead On.

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