



**EVERYBODY
WELCOME TO
THE FUTURE**

**'FOR I KNOW
THE PLANS I
HAVE FOR YOU'
JEREMIAH 29:11**

BOB JACKSON

EVERYBODY WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

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Further materials: bit.ly/ewo2020

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'Most astonishing of all, plenty of churches report very large numbers of people joining their streamed services... Even when we do return to the sacred, beautiful space of our church buildings, with all their vital and much-missed resonances of continuity... it is not one thing or the other. It is not in a building or online. We want to do both.,

**STEPHEN COTTRELL,
ARCHBISHOP OF YORK DESIGNATE,
MAY 2020**

Preface

In 'Everybody Welcome Online' we surveyed what was happening in the early lockdown weeks, gave some guidance on platforms and other responses, and mentioned preparing for the long-term future. 'Everybody Welcome to the Future' focusses on the opportunity of these extraordinary times for the mission and growth of the Church, both while the buildings are locked and when they are re-opened. It is written in the belief that God is calling his Church fully to welcome all those turning to us in these difficult times.

At the time of writing (late May) we do not know the length and nature of the route back to full use of church buildings. The Bishop of London suggests that it may be 2021 before all the buildings are fully open. There may be adjustments, intermediate stages and different timescales in different places. However it pans out, our twin aims should be to use this creative period well and to be ready to launch our new ways of being church when the time comes.

Church ministers and leaders should not keep these issues to themselves but provoke the thoughts, prayers and suggestions of the whole church community. Documents like this are best used widely disseminated. It's think and pray time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have been helped in creating these new 'Everybody Welcome' materials by too many people to mention. I would however, like to thank my wife Christine for sharpening my mind, feeding me with ideas and reminding me about God through many a critique and discussion. Although I have written this particular document, my friend George Fisher has been making valuable contributions while also keeping 'Everybody Welcome Online' up to date. Finally, we are again grateful to CPAS for their support in designing the final document.

'Why do more people access online than may be coming into our buildings? How do we enable them to enter into our community, to be part of our community?'

**THE BISHOP OF LONDON,
MAY 2020**

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'

JEREMIAH 29:11

Part 1

**ONLINE ON
TIME**



PART 1: ONLINE ON TIME

They went out (fishing) but that night they caught nothing. Jesus stood on the shore but the disciples did not recognise that it was Jesus. He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No' they answered. He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many, the net was not torn.

JOHN 21:3-6, 11

The closure of our church buildings took Christians by surprise. We knew the Church was people not buildings, but we did get rather lost inside them and some of us felt we weren't getting very far – the disciples fished all night and caught nothing.

There were a handful of totally online churches on the other side of the boat, such as SanctuaryFirst, and Holding Space, an online church community for those affected by disability. A few other churches, such as Rediscover Church in Exeter and Beacon Lough Baptist Church in Gateshead, had started livestreaming their services, reaching more people as a result of fishing from both sides of the boat at once.

Then suddenly we all had to fish from the other side of the boat. Most of us didn't even know there was another side to the boat, and until recently there wasn't. The technology to take church worship online straightforwardly is very new. But the speed and quality of adaptation has been astonishing. It has been thrilling to see our churches rise to the occasion.

We went online to keep our existing communities together, worshipping in the nearest approximation to what we had lost that we could muster. But as we cast our internet on the other

side, extra people accessed our online services. 'The Net' is full of fish – who knew.

The resilience of the internet, coping with all those Zoom meetings, live-streamings and video offerings has been impressive. 'Even with so many, the net was not torn.' (Well, except when Zoom went wobbly on May 17th.)

My favourite bit of this story in the appendix to John's gospel is that one of the seven disciples counted the fish. Fanciful theories of the deep theological meaning of the number '153' have been propounded but they hold no more water than a fishing net. It's simple. Somebody like me was present on that lake shore. He gazed in awe at the Risen Christ for a short while then got to work counting the fish. As it became clear that there were many more people attending online than in person I did indeed gaze briefly in awe at God moving his Church to the other side of the boat. But I quickly got down to the job I'm made for – counting!

Churches have responded to lockdown in more ways than just online services and prayer meetings. Many have been stepping up their social ministries. One city church with a large new online presence told us, 'We're reaching more people than ever before with the gospel and are at the heart of the many practical things being done for vulnerable people in our city.' Krish Kandiah wrote in The Times on 9 May that 'Most churches are busier than ever providing vital practical support to those self-isolating, such as delivering meals, medicines and food, as well as offering support to those anxious or grieving and needing help with funeral arrangements.'

Since the lockdown began, an inner city church in Sheffield has been feeding far more people than before. Demand was outstripping their supply of supermarket left-overs. They reluctantly made a list of food to buy to maintain the free meals, even though they couldn't afford it. Prayer became more urgent. Just before the order went in, FareShare, the supplier of surplus food, rang to offer them a ton of food, including every item on their list.

God is at work in all we do.

You may also wish to check out Pete Phillip's paper 'What's God up to?' found on our [website](#).

Here we are concerned with what God is doing in relation to online church services.

There has never been an easier time to visit church so there has never been a better time for the church to share the good news.



Part 2

**ONLINE COUNT
TIME**



PART 2: ONLINE COUNT TIME

'The word of God continued to spread and flourish.'

ACTS 12:24

Online congregations are impossible to count and tricky to estimate. But very broad-brush estimation is possible and the results are startling. We can put various pieces of emerging evidence together.

A. ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

We have heard from large numbers of individual churches, mostly with the same story of surprisingly large online congregations as measured by 'devices', 'views' and so on.

Initial amazement at the numbers of Facebook 'views' did turn to realism once Facebook analytics was accessed. Facebook favours those with the attention span of a gnat. However, even 5% of a really big number is still significant. But a greater proportion of YouTube views appear to be lengthy, and the devices numbers look solid.

On the whole, our contact churches thought that their online congregations were around 50-100% bigger than in the building. The biggest percentage increases reported were in short weekday services, especially the Anglicans' Morning Prayer and Compline. But Sunday services also saw big gains. So too have church prayer meetings.

Some churches have also reported more people making a faith commitment or signing up to an online Alpha Course or equivalent.

The growth in numbers seems to be across traditions and the country. The driving force of this movement of people towards the churches is not a church programme but from within the people, motivated by crisis and enabled by the ready availability of online church. So the people are coming to all forms, traditions, sizes and locations of church.

In 'Everybody Welcome Online' we listed the main categories of new online worshippers and their main reasons for coming. You might like to check out our lists against your own experience.

B. CHURCH OF ENGLAND DIOCESAN SURVEYS TO FIND OUT WHAT THE CHURCHES ARE DOING

Soon after lockdown began a few dioceses checked round to find out how many of their churches and benefices had taken worship online. They found that around 80-90%, of benefices had set up an online service. Not many multi-church benefices were doing separate services for their different churches, but most Anglicans had available to them online worship for their own benefice led by their own vicar.

For example, the Diocese of Exeter's survey had 199 responses from benefices. 87 reported doing pre-recorded services (for example YouTube), 58 live-streaming (usually Facebook) and 43 offering interactive services (usually on Zoom). That total of 188 probably includes some churches doing more than one of these things, but it did seem that at least 80% of the benefices were online.

C. A POPULATION SURVEY

In late April 2020, Tear Fund commissioned a polling company to conduct a survey of 2,101 UK adults about prayer and accessing church services. Answers were weighted to be representative of the UK population by age, gender, region and social grade.

The survey estimated that 24% of the UK adult population had accessed streamed, videoed, TV or radio church services since lockdown began. This compares with around 5% attending church buildings on an average Sunday. As the average churchgoer attends little more than one week in two then around 10% of the population used to go to the church buildings sometimes, more if you include the annual Christmas visit.

The anecdotes suggest that congregations have grown 50-100%, which would put the population proportion up to 15-20%. Add in the TV and radio figures and it is easy to see why the survey came up with the figure of 24%.

One in five of that 24% said that they had never previously been to church at all, that is nearly 5% of the adult population, currently around 53 million. So an estimated 2.5 million adults had accessed a church service for the first time in their lives over the first month of lockdown.

The survey found that younger adults were the group most likely to have accessed church. One third of those aged 18-34 – the most connected age group – said they had attended a service over the previous month, compared with only one fifth of the over 55s. For churches used to ageing congregations and a vast cultural gulf to young adults, this finding is startling indeed. Online worship is not just connecting with the shielded and elderly. The conclusion is clear:

Online church connects with online people, so it connects with the young.

D. THE 'EVERYBODY WELCOME ONLINE' CHURCH SURVEY

'Everybody Welcome Online' invited readers to become 'agents', conducting a local survey of their 'Churches Together' or geographical or deanery group. So far I have received forms from six full groups, four of them being Anglican deaneries. Having made enquiries about ambiguous answers and set aside the unintelligible, so far I have data on 99 churches in 64 groupings or benefices. To act as an agent surveying a group of churches please email allarewelcome2020@gmail.com. A fuller report will come when more data is in.

All but 10 of the 64 are Anglican and the spread around the country is uneven. Some churches may not have fully understood their own numbers and my conversion factors into attendance are provisional. Changing the factors changes attendance significantly (see Appendix for explanation and a copy of the survey form). Totals will further change as more data comes in. The numbers below are just a first indicative snapshot. Nevertheless they contain several points of interest.

1. **Most churches went online** Only 16%, 10 out of 64, 'benefices' were not online. Reasons included a small elderly congregation and a minister-vacancy.
2. **A lot of individuals did not switch to online at their local church** 30% either attended churches that did not go online or do not access their church's online services. 30% is a lot to lose! Many are being kept in touch pastorally, even worshipping from home using emailed or posted service sheets or telephones. Others may have switched churches. But some may be off the radar.
3. **The percentage not online is very variable** Individual churches reported between 0% and 80%. The six groups as a whole varied from 19% to 56%. Older congregations were less likely to move online, but so were congregations in more deprived areas. Churches in affluent areas lost far fewer when going online.
4. **Attendance online is substantially greater than in person** The method explained in the Appendix suggests a 49% increase in attendance online. However, changing the assumptions could change this to anything between 35% and 70%. All we can say is that the net increase is substantial and the following is as good an educated guess as any.

Going online lost 30% of the previous attendance but gained another 80%, so the net gain was 50%.

Average weekly attendance at 99 churches before lockdown	7168
Attendances that did not transfer online	2134 (30%)
Attendances that did transfer online	5034 (70%)
Estimated total online average weekly attendance	10708 (up 49%)
Extra online attendance	5674 (53% of the total)

5. Not all the extra attendance is new people

- **Frequency** Over recent decades average church attendance frequency has fallen steadily, perhaps from 80% to 55% of weeks. But under lockdown, with little else to do on a Sunday, churchgoers are probably attending more frequently again.
- **Twicing** Some churches have reported large increases in weekday attendance, which suggests that more people may be attending two or more services a week at their church.
- **Two-timing** You can now go to church anywhere in the world at whatever time and on whatever day you wish. Some people are attending services at more than one church in any given week. Some churches have new attenders from overseas.

Less frequent church-going may account for up to half the drop in average church attendance over the last thirty years and a frequency rebound could account for up to half of the online increase. But, even if true, this still leaves a lot of new people.

6. **Growth is not even nor universal** One of the six groups showed a 27% drop in attendance online, another a gain of 99%. The experience of individual benefices is extremely varied:

-100% (not online)	10
-50 to -99%	5
0 to -49%	12
1 to 49%	12
50 to 99%	10
100 to 199%	5
200% plus	10

27 churches have seen a drop online and 37 an increase. 15 have at least doubled.



7. **Growth varies by platform** Churches using only Zoom (usually by invitation only) have not shared in the attendance growth. Multi-platform churches have done better than those with a single platform (almost always Facebook or YouTube):

Zoom	8 benefices, attendance	-17%
Single-Platform	22 benefices, attendance	+51%
Multi-platform	23 benefices, attendance	+86%

8. **Growth is in all sizes of church** The thirteen smallest 'benefices' started with less than 50 average attendance. Even though four of these did not go online their total attendance still rose by a half, exactly the same as the seven largest in the sample. Major online growth is possible for any size of church.

9. **The trend is still upwards** Much of the online growth was instant. However, of those benefices online, 21 said their numbers have since been increasing, 29 steady and only 4 falling.



Part 3

**ONLINE
CHANGE TIME**



PART 3: ONLINE CHANGE TIME

See the former things have taken place, and new things I declare.

ISAIAH 42:9

Even if churches want to return to the past, that won't be possible, due to three sets of reasons.

A. The Wider World will be Different

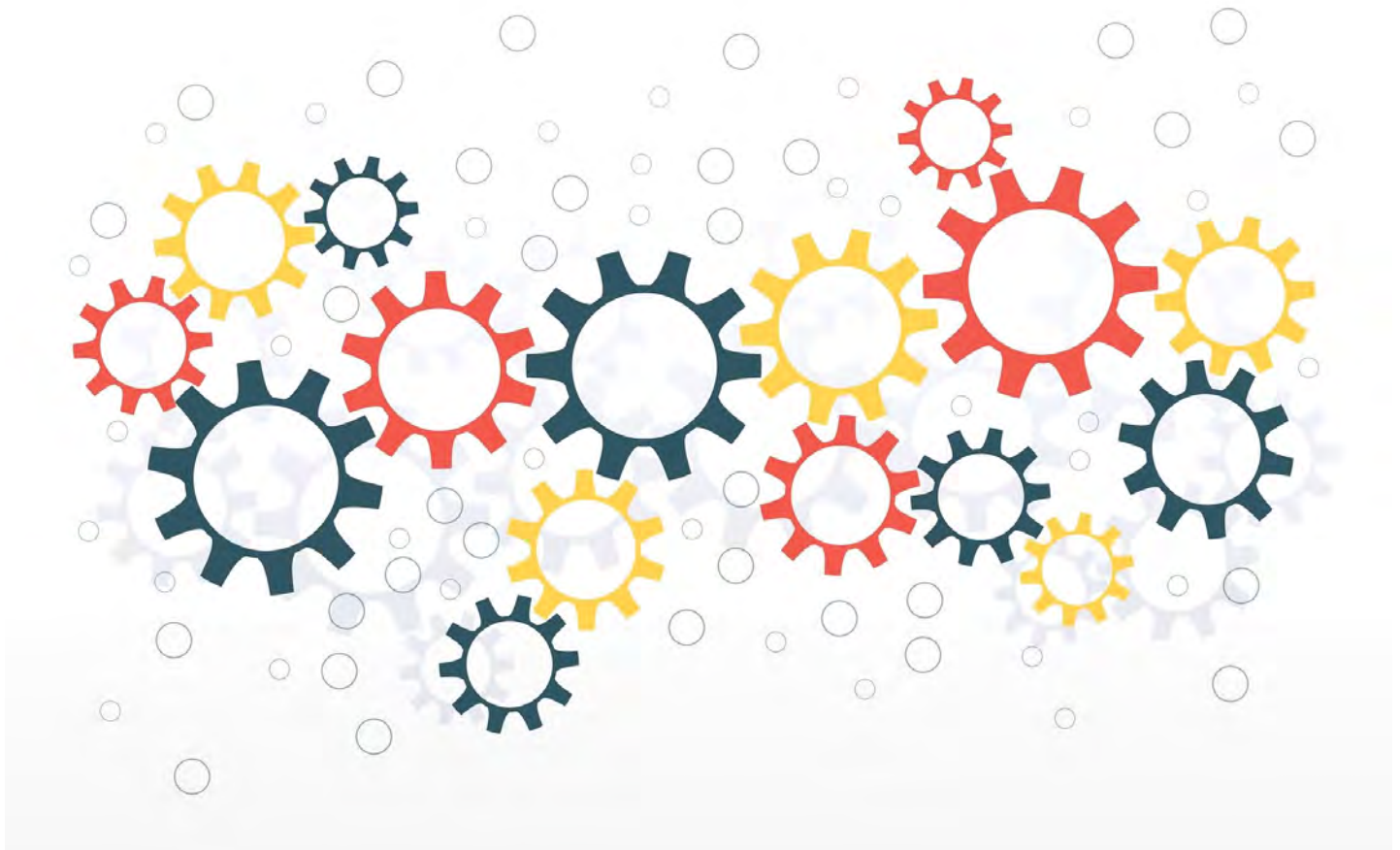
Society will be different – the zeitgeist is shifting, the angst altering. We don't yet know the strength, or even direction, of many of these changes, but change is coming:

1. The country will be poorer and unemployment higher. New and greater social needs are likely to arise, some in previously prosperous areas.
2. Government spending will be more constrained as the public debt, swollen by lockdown spending, has to be serviced and repaid. This will probably restrict its ability to meet increased social and poverty needs.
3. Urban air quality has improved and the planet has healed a little. This may now be a higher priority, or else get lost in the rush to re-start the economy.
4. More people will work from home or be put off crowded commuting or city living. Quality of life might seem more

important than income. There may be new population shifts and house price adjustments.

5. It may take years for some people to lose their fear of others. Older people may be even more reluctant to be put into retirement homes – or to mingle with church congregations. There will probably be more mental health issues, including among the young.
6. Business meetings, entertainment, shopping, holidays and social contacts have moved online – maybe some of this will stick and there will be less travel in the future or maybe people will be desperate to get out and about again.
7. Some may feel less secure, be more spiritually searching, feeling grateful for the ministry of the churches through the crisis. Others may want to forget all the lockdown angst. Those who associate church with the bad times may shy away like mourners after a church funeral. There will be many complex and sub-conscious responses to the crisis that affect attitudes to God and Church.

However things pan out, churches wishing to respond to the times will need to monitor these changes to the public sphere, mood and needs.



B. The Existing Church Community will have Changed

1. Some churches have developed a stronger culture of pastoral care being a whole community responsibility – this may continue.
2. Some have been praying more urgently and prayer meetings have been bigger online than in person. This may be part of a general desire for the faith to be deeper, more serious, involving encounters with the living Jesus to sustain us through trying times.
3. Small elderly congregations may find it particularly hard to re-form. Some members may have died, become frail, gone to live with their daughter, got out of the habit, be afraid to congregate, still be ‘shielded’, or decide they prefer online services. Some may never re-start. Others will be weaker – though of course news of the death of small rural Anglican churches has been much exaggerated for centuries.
4. Online technology is exposing fault lines in some churches. Only some of us have taken happily to constant platform chatter, Zoom coffee meetings, video sharing and online worship. About 20% of typical congregations don’t even have the technology to get engaged anyway. So we may be developing three-tier churches – the enthusiastically connected, the reluctantly connected and the unconnected.
5. Some Christians will have been re-assessing their church life while adjusting to the online version. They may come back to in-person church with new attitudes and expectations.
6. All of us have been under stress, and it can be easier to damage relationships online and harder to mend them. While some may have pulled together well, some church communities may emerge with new fractures.
7. Those with a connected device have been able to access any church service they want from anywhere. Comparisons

8. Some church members will be willing and able to congregate but others not so. We may need to offer church life and services to both groups at once. This will be more complex and demanding than the comparatively simple lockdown situation.
9. Local churches have lost cash collections, hall rentals and visitor income. Some church members will be poorer. Denominations and dioceses may well suffer from lower investment income as well as smaller contributions from cash-strapped churches. Spending will need watching and some posts may go. The trend in the Church of England towards a ‘Focal Minister’ model of local church leadership may need to accelerate.
10. But if the new online congregations stay with us, either online or in-person, larger churches will mean healthier finances in the long term.

C. The New Online Church-goers will bring Inevitable Change

Every new person in a church community changes it by their very presence. Significant numbers of new online worshippers will mean substantial change. Churches that get organised to welcome their new online communities will change the whole way they live and operate. And they could easily continue to grow when fishing from both sides of the boat at once. Larger, stronger churches will be able to serve their communities better, be more influential in society, and be better able to share God’s love.

On the other hand, churches that abandon their new mission field and turn inwards on themselves are unlikely to thrive.

For those who wish to avoid change, there is nowhere to hide. The past is over, God is declaring new things. The world around us will be different, the pre-existing congregations will be different and the way we respond to the new online congregations, even if we ignore them, will change us deeply.

So churches must choose whether to be passive victims of change or active shapers of change.

My church growth research over several decades has always told me the same thing – churches failing to make intentional changes tend to shrink and wither but churches making intentional changes tend to grow and flourish.

What sort will your church be?



Part 4

**ONLINE
WELCOME TIME**

OPEN

PART 4: ONLINE WELCOME TIME

'It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.'

ACTS 15:19

In the early days of the Alpha Course, churches often assumed that Alpha graduates turned into regular Christians, happily slotting into pre-existing church programmes and cultures. Alpha was about expansion, not change. However, many turned out not to be clones of the denizens of the back pew. Churches needed to change, fresh expressions to be grown, to welcome and accommodate different sorts of people into the body of Christ.

The same was true of those who went forward at the Billy Graham meetings I helped organise in Sheffield in 1985. Some did make the tricky journey into churches. Others didn't, partly because we thought new people were joining a fixed form of church rather than envisioning a flexible church adjusting to them.

So we need to welcome well in the period of closed churches and then to re-shape church life to maintain the welcome and growth in the long term.

As we construct today's pathways from observing church to participating, and from considering faith to having it, we should think flexibly, adjusting church life for the new era. Missional churches learn to receive from people and don't try to control them. That's how they get changed by the experience of mission.

We should not make it difficult for those who are turning to God.

Before we turn to longer-term planning, here is a structure for evangelism under lock-down. Large numbers are accessing our online services not just because they are socially isolated but also because they are spiritually hungry. How can we best offer the bread of life to those who are searching for it? Don't be daunted by this. Even small steps might bear fruit. This is a team effort, it's too much for a lone wolf. Sensitivity to individuals is key. Befriend, don't bombard. Save time and effort by praying for the right openings.

1. **Establish a list of contacts** This is the key to everything else. If you are using Zoom you should know who the new people are because you can ask them. If you use Facebook the comments and likes will be a big start. If you use YouTube pre-recorded services it is harder to know who is participating. But you can still ask the church community if they know anyone who is. Many online visitors will already know someone at the church – that may well be the reason

they chose your church. And you can keep asking people to make contact through the website, Facebook, Instagram, email or vegetable ink on vellum parchment. Give them as wide a range of options as possible. Unless the numbers are very small, a minister will need to ask a small team to assemble the list of names and contact details.

2. **Make contact** The team can then make contact to say hello and how much the church values their presence at services. Check out how they are, offer to pray for them, find out who in the church community might naturally befriend them.
3. **Invite to a Zoom Social** Set up small Zoom meetings (up to about eight people) that mix established and new congregation members. These could be one-offs or recurrent each a week or two. The aim is to help people get to know and support each other better.
4. **Set up a START or Alpha online group** Advertise this during the services, at the social Zooms, on the website, on a newsletter, by Facebook, every which way. Keep the exact format, timing and length of the course flexible to suit the enquirers. There is a new START course alternative – a version you can do by yourself at home, perhaps with the help of a mentor. Check out the Alpha and LyCiG websites, or those for other courses you may wish to use, for what is available.
5. **Plan an evangelistic guest service** Flag up a future Sunday service in the regular slot. Ask everyone to bring a friend to it. Give personal invitations to everyone on the contact list and ask them to invite a friend. In the service invite people to respond to Jesus and encourage them to pray to him. Then ask those who have responded to get in touch to tell you. Give them the full range of ways of getting in touch – Facebook, website, phone call, email, snail-mail and so on.
6. **Follow people up** Give them a chance to talk to someone about their response. Help each individual to a next step. Give them something to read. Suggest something to access online. Invite them to the next Christian basics course.
7. **Maintain the invitation message** It has never been so easy to invite people to church. Invitation is working as never before. So encourage everyone to invite their contacts as a matter of habit.
8. **Don't hide inside but walk and talk** If you have a dog collar, walk around and wear it. Combine the tech approach with this most old fashioned yet timeless approach, chatting to people over the garden wall or outside the shops, all at a two metre distance. Spend time with and take contact details from those who are open, seeking, or who have already accessed an online service.
9. **Activate the team** Who will prepare the building for re-opening with an online element, run the in-person social gatherings when they are allowed again, do the visiting and befriending, and accompany the nervous to their first in-building service?

Part 5

**PLANNING
CHANGE IN
LOCKDOWN
TIME**

PART 5: PLANNING CHANGE IN LOCKDOWN TIME

'The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few.'

MATTHEW 9:37

Now we have gone through the emergency phase of re-setting church life online, it is time to think about constructing the future church into which we can welcome our new online friends.

And there is another huge change-opportunity to grasp. The hardest thing in church life is not to start up the new but to stop the established. This is the reason why so many churches try to do too much, the people are worn out and nothing gets done well. But now an outside force has stopped everything. Church leaders cannot be blamed for this. Not re-starting something, after a gap of several months, sounds less problematic than actively stopping it. The precious time before re-starts are allowed can be used to plan streamlined and re-purposed church.

Online church, outside changes and the chance to re-think, together demand that we re-imagine our churches in the comparative calm before the doors are opened.

Are we overstating all this? When the world returns to normal, won't the online newcomers melt away as snow in spring? Some of us have spent our entire church lives struggling with

decline and disappointment. Change has not usually been for the better. Defeatism is hard to shake off. And it can be self-fulfilling if we let it paralyse us.

Our new friends will disappear if we simply go off-line. Even with good welcome and provision not all will stay – Jesus told us what to expect in the parable of the sower and the seed.

But many will stay and flourish in the good soil of a healthy church. The weight of numbers is such that there is massive scope for growth not only under lockdown but for embedding further growth in the renewed church that will follow it.

The future is there to be shaped if we recognise God at work in mission, and join in.

It is clear we should re-think our churches, but how should we do it?

Every church is unique so plans should be tailor-made, forged in prayer for guidance. I am not prejudging the content of plans, apart from, you may have noticed, urging an online element. But I want to suggest a process of preparation for intentional change.

The situation demands strong leadership – both local and wider – informed and empowered by widespread consultation. Consultation should happen now and quickly to allow the



church leadership to make and start implementing their decisions. In these uncharted waters, hunch and experience are uncertain guides. Just listening to a couple of loud voices is always unwise. Rather than guess what either the new on-liners or the old hands are thinking and wanting, ask them. Two sample questionnaires are appended to this document. Here are the links to versions in word you can use and amend yourself.

- [Sample Questionnaire to pre-existing church congregations.](#)
- [Sample Questionnaire to new online churchgoers.](#)

You can also ask people more informally, but the questionnaire approach offers everyone an equal voice.

Here are four categories in which to consider present and future church. Nothing is neat and tidy but using them may help clarity of thought and action.

A. Wider Doors – How we Welcome People

‘Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’

MATTHEW 9:38

How can we enlarge the online connection made between church and world, this door we have opened into the living rooms of the nation, this portal from home to church? And how can we be more welcoming and open generally?

This is not about the church minister working alone. It is about finding workers, building a team, giving each person one job to



do well. For example, one person could keep the contacts list, another be a matchmaker between existing and new church members to pair them up. Another would have the task of extracting all the platform data available, another be asked to acquire a working technical knowledge of your platforms. If you are a church minister but organising teams is not your forte then appoint someone else while you focus on what you do best.

Moving to online harvesting is like moving from a scythe to a hi-tech combine in one jump. Different skills are at a premium. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers to your church with the skills needed:

1. Keep an open platform – this is the main advantage of Facebook. Don't replace Facebook with YouTube or something else. Do both-and. Even if you point people to a YouTube video, advertise it on Facebook.
2. Check out your current online offer – are there ways of being more open? For example, if on Zoom can you ask all your congregation to invite a friend to the Zoom service next week? If you are Sunday morning only, would short weekday prayers or liturgy reach into different living rooms?
3. Be visitor-friendly in every online interaction, make people feel welcome, included. Reveal yourselves, use testimony, be people others would want to get to know.
4. But put the main focus on the main draw – God's grace, Jesus' love, the Spirit's presence. Draw people into the presence of God – there is no point in having wider doors if there are no deeper wells (see B) for people to drink from. Online church should act like a priest – connecting human beings with the living God.
5. Use every way you can think of to find out who is accessing the services. Follow up comments and likes, ask around if there are names you don't recognise. Someone else may know them. Are church members aware of friends, neighbours or family who are joining in? Invite people to make contact to say hello. Get hold of as many contact details as possible.
6. Offer personal contact to anyone interested. Offers could include a FaceTime/WhatsApp/Skype chat, a Zoom gathering, a phone call, an email, an Alpha, Christianity Explored or START Course.
7. Invite everyone new to fill out your version of the questionnaire. This will help you get to know people as well as help you shape future church.
8. Start planning the post lockdown welcome. Have a team ready to visit in person when that is allowed, have in mind a 'welcome' social event. Give as many personal invitations as possible to the first services back in the building. Have church members willing to call on people and come with them to church.
9. Make decisions soon about equipping the church building for broadcasting or streaming services. Don't wait until you are back in the building after which you decide what to do over three or four monthly church leadership meetings.

Those who need or wish to stay online will have been lost. Decide and act now.

B. Deeper Wells – What we Welcome People Into

‘The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life’. The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water.’

JOHN 4:14-15

The times are more serious, the needs greater. People who never pray have turned to prayer. Church members who have paddled in the shallows for years yearn to go deeper. The crowds turning to the Church expect to be offered God, the water of eternal life, not a social club. Yet there is also a huge human need for deeper community and relationships. It is not good to be alone. Deeper relationships are harder online but they can be worked at, especially in one-to-ones and small groups.

Somehow or other we should seek to dig both deeper spiritual and deeper social wells to satisfy the appetites of the newly thirsty.

The Christian Church has something unique to offer in the face of a deadly virus. Our attitude to death is different – we believe it’s not the end. Jesus has defeated it. He journeys with us through both life and death. We can look death in the face. It’s our portal into eternity. Quality of life is sometimes more important than quantity – how well we live matters more in eternity than how long we live. We have on offer the wherewithal to cope with death, bereavement and mortality, to give hope to all.

Who is sufficient for these things?



We can’t offer people what we do not have. So the times demand, of Christian leaders, deeper prayer, more focussed reflection and renewed faith. Personally I pray best from the top of a hill. As far as I am aware, it is one of the few ways in which I am similar to our Lord. So I climb the 600 feet from my house to the top of Eyam Moor most days. We need to know ourselves and where our spiritual energy, learning, depth come from.

But of course we are not alone. Invite, challenge the whole church community to dig deeper in prayer alone and together, in Bible study, in small groups. It may be that spiritual sustenance, deepening the wells, comes from some of the quieter, older people you didn’t realise had such a big spade. In my church some genuine spiritual joy and sustenance has come from children making Messy Church videos.

For some, the deeper wells will be found by re-discovering older spiritual disciplines that had withered. Short liturgical services – the daily office, compline – have touched unprecedented numbers of people. This may be something the contemporary or charismatic streams can learn from the catholic or contemplative streams. Recognise that not all the deeper spiritual wells have been fully explored by the tradition in which you sit. Now is a time to learn from each other. And don’t guess what will sustain people, ask them in conversation as well as by questionnaire.

For some of us, a less frantic version of church life might give us space to deepen our relationship with God rather than get frazzled with too much doing. If you can make some space in the new church diary, don’t fill it immediately.

C. Wiser Programmes – What we Welcome People to Take Part In

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need... they continued to meet together in the temple courts... they broke bread in their homes... and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

ACTS 2:42,45,46,47

Check elements of the church’s programme against the doors and wells agenda – does this either open the doors wider or make the wells deeper? If not, then it may need setting on one side.

Church activities should fit the needs of the world and the church today, not yesterday. So church programmes need reviewing for reasons other than large online congregations. Changing social needs may, for example, move food banks and debt counselling higher up the agenda. An honest look at each aspect of previous church life would reveal which of them had

born little fruit. And a clear sense of future vision and priorities would show up which activities are peripheral and which are central.

What sort of programme of church life might engage the new people met online? This might involve developing an online element or version of nurture courses or small groups or daily prayer or prayer-partners. And it might involve creating some stepping stones enabling people to cross over to in-person church – home visits, new friendships, social events, open days in the church building to get people over the threshold, and so on.

We should not unthinkingly revert to the pattern and styles of previous church services. How has the lock-down period changed us, our outlook, our worshipping priorities? What new style or times suggest themselves as better meeting spiritual needs and digging deeper wells? Some churches have found that online services are better if they are shorter, tighter, pacier. Tightly timed video sermons may have more impact. What does that teach us about sermons in the building?

What existing services should not re-start? For example, a rural group of churches may include a couple of tiny congregations that have been further weakened by the period out of the building. On the other hand, a much larger number of people have been newly accessing the online service. The church leaders have limited time and energy. Should they put that energy into resuscitating dying congregations or giving birth to new ones? Most of us would love to do both, but that may not be possible. Choices have to be made.

The decision about a long-term online element to church worship may best be shaped by the consultation process around the two questionnaires.

- Are there identifiable groups of online worshippers? The elderly, the shielded, and the care home residents may need a different solution from the newly-searching young adults.
- How many would prefer to come in person, how many to stay online?

It is impossible to know exactly how the future will unfold, so any plans to add online elements to church worship should be flexible and provisional. Make adjustments to keep matching the style and content to the people who are accessing. As you develop online experience and expertise while waiting for in-person worship to fully resume, store it up and use it to shape what you can offer in the long-term.

In many churches there will need to be a new tech-training programme for online worship. Treasurers may need training in how to enable and encourage online worshippers to give financially to the church. Worship leaders may need training in how to respond to the presence of cameras.

D. Smarter Structures – What we Welcome People to Belong To

Their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘Choose seven men from among you... we will turn this responsibility over to them.’

ACTS 6:1-3

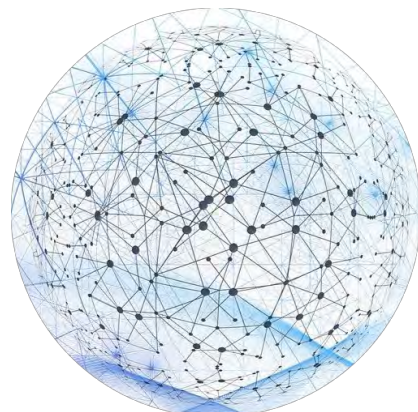
The structures should support the church we are creating, not the one we are leaving behind. Who will be the leaders of the online operation and how will they be organised and operate? How does the pastoral care team need to structure for a blended in-person and online congregation? What should the small group structure look like?

Leadership may look different also. Most churches or groups of churches will become more complex as online elements emerge. Many, we trust, will be bigger, involving more people. To accommodate this, leadership styles will need to change with larger teams and more devolved responsibility. Clergy will need to re-assess their own priorities, perhaps devolving day-to-day individual church or service leadership to others in order to release part of their time to engage with new people. In the Church of England, for example, the move towards ‘focal ministers’ leading individual churches may need accelerating (for an explanation of this see my Grove Leadership Booklet L34 [‘Leading One Church at a Time’](#)).

Denominations and dioceses may need to re-think their deployment strategies. One or two Anglican dioceses are already wondering whether to set up diocesan online churches, for example for young people or for the housebound and shielded. If they do that then they will need to staff the churches they are planting. This may mean fewer traditional church posts.

In the Church of England, dioceses will need to facilitate the equipping of church buildings to go online rather than have the technology delayed or frustrated by unsympathetic DACs.

Whatever structures we create, modify or dismantle, their purpose should be to support and facilitate the contemporary mission of God’s people in the post lock-down world.



Part 6

ONLINE
AFTER
LOCKDOWN
TIME



PART 6: ONLINE AFTER LOCKDOWN TIME

'We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified.' Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'

NUMBERS 13:27,30

There may be an awkward intermediate phase during which church worship is permitted under joyless conditions – hand washing, social distancing, face-masks, no singing and no communion. Most churches would want to continue online along with this, others may decide to wait for a fuller return to in-building worship.

As this may happen in the summer, an alternative for some will be to worship outside. I live in the Derbyshire village of Eyam, where the plague arrived from London in 1665. Led by the Rector, the village locked down for many months and nobody left as the plague killed about a third of the people, even though they practised social distancing. They met for church every Sunday, but well scattered round a natural amphitheatre on the edge of the village – The Cucklett Delph. If we are allowed to congregate outdoors again, we know where to go.

When we finally reach the full post-corona Promised Land we can listen to the Calebs or the others. Each church must find its own route in the general migration to a new era. But, if I may be permitted to be Caleb for a moment, we should certainly keep and take possession of the online land we have walked

into. The people who inhabit that land are powerful and our secular cities are well fortified against the gospel of Jesus. But a route has opened up for the Holy Spirit, bi-passing the secular fortifications, right into the homes of the nation. We cannot retreat back into wilderness-wandering.

In Part 4 of 'Everybody Welcome Online' we urged churches to plan for the future so that they are ready as soon as the doors of the buildings are open.

We suggested that many churches would want to live-stream services in a blended-in-person-online-style of church community. This raises many questions and issues. Each one listed below is significant but the key is our attitude. Do we focus on the problems, like the other spies, or on the opportunities, like Caleb? All the problems we see ahead can be turned into opportunities.

WOULD JESUS EVER HAVE SAID?

'I know we don't want to be constrained by buildings, but the logistical difficulties of preaching to 5000 people in the remote countryside are too great. How would we feed them? Toilets, the amplification system, insurance cover, follow-up, we're not geared up for it. Let's stick with the fifty seater synagogue.'

LIVE-STREAM ISSUES

1. Nobody in our church has the expertise to fit the church out or even know how to go about it.

There are lots of 'show you how' videos on YouTube. There are companies who would explain and quote for what was needed. Dioceses and denominations have advisers to help you. Or find a friendly local expert and let them befriend you. St Mark's Pennington told us about their effort just prior to lockdown: 'We realised we didn't have quite all the kit we needed, so put out a post on our local community Facebook group asking for help. In the next hour, while we continued working in church, Alan from the pub turned up with an audio jack and mics, and Peter the vicar from Lymington church came with a box of mics etc. from their church.'

2. We'd have to screw cameras to pillars. Our diocese wouldn't allow all that gadgetry in our Grade 1 listed church.

There is always a way. Dioceses and Archdeacons are already working on ways to give quick, helpful permissions for live-streaming work. It may not require faculty permission anyway – especially with tripod-based cameras. Ask the diocese to help, don't think of them as a potential enemy.



3. We've lost a lot of income, church finances are shot to ribbons. This would cost a lot of money. We can't afford it.

The cost is probably less than you think – usually hundreds not thousands. It will be the best investment your church ever makes because it will increase congregation sizes and therefore the number of givers. This is not a threat to church finances, this is how your church finances will be repaired. If you have the money, invest it. If not then you have a wonderful opportunity to give your new online congregation ownership of what is happening, to build loyalty and commitment. Announce a Gift Day for livestreaming. 'If you have appreciated online church so far and would like to continue, please contribute'. Offer a range of ways of contributing – from online banking transfers to posting cheques. As well as raising the money, the church will give people a taste of the joys of giving, ownership and belonging. There may also be grants available – one Church of England diocese is offering grants of up to £2000 for church streaming installation.

4. What would be the point of filming the service at Church X? Three old ladies and a dog freezing to death. Who would want to watch that? I've got eight churches, some only have a service once a month. It may be a good idea in the town but its impractical here.

Most groups of small churches only need one building fitted out to stream services. Pick the one with the most potential. Churches that did live-stream before lockdown saw a steady trickle of people who started online then arrived in person. So centre your online operation on the church with the friendliest, most open congregation. That will be your best growth-point.

5. The older people who might appreciate it are not even connected online.

Many retired people are perfectly capable online. For the others, ask someone to collect second hand laptops and other free or cheap devices, then teach people how to use them. Simply write out the sequence of buttons to press to get to a service. Alternatively ask a neighbour or friend to pop in at 10.55 to switch the device on for them. You never know, the neighbour might stay and take part themselves.

6. Our main service is too long for successful streaming. It takes 15 minutes to communicate the faithful at the mass/ we like a 25 minute block singing with the worship group/ the minister always preaches for 40 minutes and gets to point 1 after 20/we usually start late with ten minutes of notices so online people will have switched off before we even begin/insert your local variation.

It is true that we are learning that 40-45 minutes is probably the online limit. Also, most people sitting at home don't join in with singing, and online discipline usually requires tight and fairly fast-moving presentation. So there is a mismatch in many churches. The answer is to re-imagine our church service styles and patterns. Many people might appreciate the online disciplines being applied to in-person church. But also, think of it the other

way round. Frame one Sunday service around the online need. Just sing one or two items, use interactive liturgy with words on the screen, have a tight ten minute sermon with the asides set aside, start smartly, keep the pace moving, focussing on God more than community. When the shortened service is over there will be time for extended human interaction over refreshments in church and at a Zoom meeting for the online congregation. Help onliners interact over coffee. Many people may well come in person to a service designed for online. Win-win.

7. That might work in churches with multiple congregations but we only have one service a week. We like to keep everyone together and our services always last over an hour.

Advertise the building service to start at say 10am and the online service at 10.15, towards the end of a block of singing. When the minister announces the end of the online service, the building congregation can have, say, prayer ministry and a final hymn. Or film the whole service then edit it down to 40 minutes and place it on the web a couple of hours late for people to access when they want, though they lose the live option this way.

8. I can just about manage online services in lock-down, when there is less to do. But once everything else starts up again I won't have the time and energy for it.

Clergy and leaders should re-think priorities, including ministering to large online congregations. But live-streaming an existing church service is not onerous for clergy. Find people to run the tech, cameras and hosting of online members. People with practical gifts have much more to offer in this new era so grow them as leaders through it. Running the systems is not normally difficult. Train a small rota of operators. Perhaps the biggest opportunity is to look for local tech-minded people of goodwill to help you out. There may be people willing to come to church in order to do a job to help you out. Find them, make a fuss of them. Many will stay and some will come to faith. Streaming is not about clergy-overload, but about building a team, growing the church and sharing the load.

9. The daily office I used to say by myself in church, or with a couple of friends, has turned into a public act of worship with fifty people all watching me. It's no longer my spiritual feeding-time, it's just another drain on me. I even do a homily now.

Once you have stopped rejoicing at the spiritual revival in your parish or cathedral, you may indeed have to find another time for some private prayer, reflection, re-fuelling. You may not need to offer online devotional services every day. You could train someone else to lead sometimes to give variety for the congregation and experience of this sort of ministry to someone promising. This could be a growth-point, even the seed of an ordination calling. Your role is not to do all the ministry but to ensure the ministry is done.

10. It is too demanding to offer alternative online and in-person version. We don't want to make big changes anyway.

Though it may not be ideal, then just live-stream whatever it is you do, warts and all. You may still be surprised at how many people access it. They will learn to put the kettle on or go to the toilet in the boring bits. Or to watch it in bite sizes through the week.

11. Online congregations would avoid the collection – they would freeload on the others. Online could attract people away from the buildings and shrink collections.

Ask online members to contribute financially, ideally electronically. Others might take giving-envelopes to be collected monthly by a church representative. Asking people to give is essential both for encouraging belonging and to maintain church finances. Growing in giving is part of growing in faith. Onliners will give if asked.

12. I can see the attraction for the housebound or shielded but, frankly, online church is a pale shadow of the real thing. I'm not sure there is much point in encouraging mobile people to do it. They should get off their sofas and take part properly.

Experience pre lockdown suggests that some people will indeed transition from online to in-person. That may well become the main route by which people join churches. You can observe and start interacting without any commitment, and only make the big step into the building when you have built up some confidence. So online for many is a stepping stone en-route to the building. But others will choose, for a wide variety of reasons, to stay online. These will include

being unavailable at the service time because of work or other commitments. There are many things a church can do to enrich the church experience for its online community. Some may be online on Sunday but in person for a small group on Wednesday evening, or be an online representative on the church council. Issue every online regular with a pew Bible so they can find the page number for the reading. Include a recorded testimony interview with someone from time to time. Maybe someone online could lead the prayers with their video clip being up on the church screen. To many people, their online relationships are just as real as their face-to-face ones. The vast numbers accessing online demonstrate that far more people consider online church worthwhile to them than used to come to church in person.

I've been a church leader for nearly fifty years. This is the most interesting, exciting and important moment in all that time. I don't exactly know what church will look like in the new post-corona era. But I do know I'm looking forward to finding out. God is certainly on the move, we are reaching new people and new opportunities abound. A promised land awaits the Caleb-led churches.

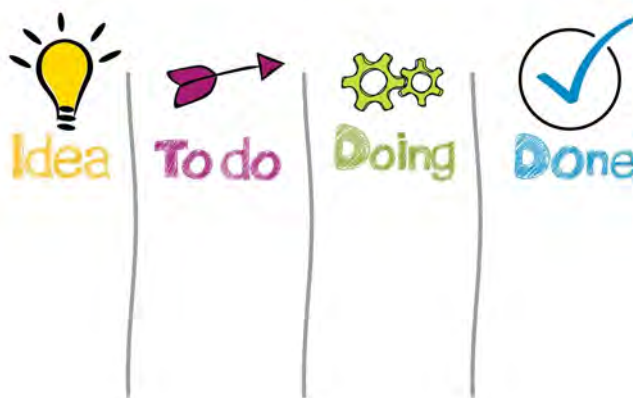


Appendix

ESTIMATION METHOD FOR ONLINE ATTENDANCE

APPENDIX: ESTIMATION METHOD FOR ONLINE ATTENDANCE

1. **Zoom** Simply use the number given by the respondent.
2. **Facebook**
 - a. **Peak Devices** From the evidence of Facebook analytics and the messages and likes of one or two actual congregations, Peak Devices looks a reasonable estimate of the number of devices following livestreaming all or most of the way. I multiply the peak devices number by 1.5 as an estimate of the average number of people per device. Many couples and families watch live-streaming on large devices together at home. Where churches have a high proportion of children in the congregation that proportion is increased in stages up to 2.1.
 - b. **Subsequent Views** Facebook analytics shows that most of these views last for less than a minute. Facebook is a platform of many glances. From looking at the total view time of those watching for more than a minute in Facebook Analytics, I estimate that it is reasonable, on average, to include only 5% of views as lasting most or all of the service, and therefore to be counted in as 'attendance'. As most of these seem to be on phones there is no 'people per device' multiplier.
3. **YouTube** The proportion of views that are long enough to be counted as attendance at the time a YouTube service is premiered and the congregation is asked to gather is estimated at 80%. For subsequent views the estimate used here is 20%. Where the church only gives one figure to cover both I've used 60%. I would like to hear from more people in order to adjust these percentages and begin to have more confidence in them. I use the same 'people' multiples as for Facebook livestreaming.
4. **Other Platforms** Only five church groups use another platform, which I have treated in the same way as YouTube.
5. **Multi-platforms** Where churches are using Zoom as well as Facebook or YouTube, I add the totals together. Where churches are using both Facebook and YouTube I assume they are live-streaming with Facebook then placing the video on YouTube for subsequent views.
6. **Sensitivity tests** I have made total online estimates on the basis of both more optimistic and more pessimistic assumptions and by including or excluding the more problematic-looking answers. I could produce online estimates anywhere between 35% and 70% higher than the pre lockdown attendance total. The assumptions used here produce a fairly central estimate of 49%. But this is no more than an educated guess.
7. **Grossing up to a national figure** This cannot be done because there are too few sample groups so far and most of them are Anglican. All we have is a first indication.



Everybody Welcome Online Survey Form

Local Survey Form (explained at bit.ly/ewo2020)

Name, location and denomination of church:

1. Prior to Lockdown, what was the average weekly attendance at the church's services?

Adults:

Children:

2. During the Lockdown is the church offering online services?

Yes No

(If the answer is 'no' then, thank you, that is the end of your survey)

3. If the church partners with others (e.g. that share the same minister) to offer online services, please name the group or list the churches.

4. About what % of the congregation are unable to access online or choose not to do so?

5. What platform(s) does the church use for online services?

Zoom Facebook YouTube Instagram

Other (please specify):

6. Zoom: about how many participate in these services each week?

7. Devices other than Zoom:

What is the weekly average of peak accessing devices when live-streaming or premiering your church services?

About how many subsequent 'views' does the platform report?

8. Do you think the number of people accessing these online services is:

Declining Staying about the same Increasing

Sample Questionnaire to New Online Churchgoers

We are delighted that you have been taking part in our online worship. We'd like to find out what is working for you, how we can improve, and what you are hoping for in the future. Here is a short questionnaire, but if you prefer just to phone or email then please do so.

1. What attracted you to our church in particular? Did you have a connexion already?

2. What is the most valuable thing for you about accessing online worship?

3. Are there ways in which we can develop and improve what we do?

4. When the crisis is over please tick which option you think you would prefer

To access services online, either as now or live-streamed from the church building

To try out a church service in person in the building

To return to your previous pattern, perhaps because normal life makes church hard to fit in or to return to your own church

To connect with the church in a different way (please tell us what that might be)

I/we live (please tick):

In walking distance from the church

A drive away

Too far away to attend in person

I/we are aged (please put the number of each family member):

under 18:

18-34:

35-54:

55+:

It's up to you, but we would love to have a contact detail from you so that we don't lose touch. We are thrilled to have you 'attend' online worship and would love to get to know you better:

Sample Questionnaire to Pre-existing Church Congregations

We're missing meeting together, though new people have been joining us online. Now can you help us think about the future? How is the online experience working and what changes should we make when the church buildings are fully open again? If a questionnaire is not your thing, do phone or email to let me know your thoughts.

1. What elements of our online church are you accessing? (please tick)

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunday services | <input type="checkbox"/> Weekday services | <input type="checkbox"/> Home | <input type="checkbox"/> Groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> Message platforms | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> None |

2. If you are not taking part in our online church why is that?

- I prefer not to I am unable to

3. On a scale of 0 to 5, how spiritually helpful and fulfilling do you find online church services?

- 0 1 2 3 4 5

Any comments?

4. How could we improve online services for you?

5. Is there anything helpful you have learnt from watching other churches' services?

6. On the same 0 to 5 scale how well does online church fellowship work for you?

- 0 1 2 3 4 5

Any comments?

7. Will you have any problems returning to worship in our church building?

- No Yes (feeling unsafe, being shielded) Yes (other reasons, please specify)

8. Should we retain an online element to church life and services in the long term?

- No (online is a temporary measure) Yes (to include those who find it hard to attend)

9. If yes what suggestions do you have?

10. What other changes to church life should we make when the buildings are fully back in use?