



where do we go from here?

moving forward in the midst of coronavirus
a church resource

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for the
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contents

introduction 2
 why this resource? 2
 how to use this resource 3
 pray discuss act 3
 going further 4

how is your church doing? 6
 responsive church 6
 the cost of change 6
 pray discuss act 6
 going further 7

mission and evangelism 8
 open for mission 8
 the five marks of mission for today 8
 social distance without being socially distant 10
 pray discuss act 10
 going further 10

serving the community 12
 emerging from lockdown 12
 effects of the pandemic 12
 a resurgence of faith? 13
 community engagement for changed communities 14
 pray discuss act 14
 going further 15

encouraging new ministries and vocations 17
 new people 17
 new ministries 17
 encouraging vocation and service 17
 pray discuss act 18
 going further 19

online church 20
 IT literacy 20
 who is running online church? 20
 the why and what of online church 21
 online church beyond lockdown 22
 pray discuss act 24
 going further 25

conclusion 26

introduction

why this resource?

new horizons

At the time of writing, we've been living with the coronavirus pandemic for several months. At first, it seemed to many that in a few months everything would be back to normal. Now we know that this is not to be the case and we'll be living in this changed state for some time to come. It's clear that the impact on the Church and society is going to be both profound and long-lasting and touch many areas; the ways in which we live and function, our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing and the economic situation of individuals, households and organisations (to name a few).

At first, we could just hunker down and wait for it to pass. Now, we need to start living in this new reality and find new ways of being church; not just to survive from week to week, but to start to look a little further, toward the horizon to which God is calling us.

This resource is designed to help you do just that. Our hope is that it will help you and your church to rediscover some direction and vision from the midst of all that has happened.

You don't have to read this document all at once. It's not another thing to do. Dip into the sections that you think will help you at the time that is right and use the bits that will be fruitful.

the basis for the resource

In June of this year, the Discipleship Mission and Ministry Team published a report entitled 'Future Church', designed for senior church leaders in the Diocese. Its aim was to gather information and make recommendations about the impact and response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

However, many people in local churches found the report helpful and asked for something more tailored to their situation. So, we've produced this resource, based on the report 'Future Church'. We pray that it can offer some areas for reflection and discussion for your PCC or leadership team.

finding specific advice and policy

This resource is focused more on a wider view and engaging missionally during this time, rather than on the practicalities of 'doing' church day to day. You therefore won't find particular advice or policy statements here around these things. If you need that, there has been much published already through the Bishop of Derby's COVID-19 Updates, as well as other through other sources:

- Church of England Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for churches web page <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>
- The Diocese of Derby Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for parishes web page <https://derby.anglican.org/en/coronavirus-guidance-for-parishes.html>
- The Diocese of Derby Ideas and Inspiration web page <https://derby.anglican.org/en/our-mission/community-engagement/ideas-for-community-engagement.html>

- The Diocese of Derby Digital resources for parishes web page <https://derby.anglican.org/en/digital-resources-for-parishes.html>

The last of these pages offers a wealth of information on receiving donations online, copyright and licensing. Zoom, livestreaming, social media and other information for the current time.

how to use this resource

The last thing we want this resource to be an extra burden. You may well already be feeling overwhelmed. Instead, we want this resource to be a way of helping you to see the wood for the trees – to give some themes and areas on which to focus and help you start to find a way forward.

Each section looks at a different aspect of the impact of the virus. You can use the contents page to skip to the section you're interested in or take each section in order – it's up to you. It's designed to be used primarily among PCCs and leadership teams.

We can't offer a specific list of things to do. Every place will be different and will need a different response. What we can do is try and give you some tools to discern what your responses should be. Above all, any responses you make will need to be flexible – things can and will change.

a Kairos moment

But why now? Can't we wait until we all feel a bit more in control?

In lots of ways, this is a bit of a 'Kairos' moment. Kairos is a Greek word for, 'a moment in time'. It refers to a particular moment, a moment of significance that is in some way unique or unusual.

Metal is much easier to shape when it has been heated and is malleable, even molten. Once it hardens, changing its shape takes much more time and energy and can even result in damaging or destroying the object. We are in a time of change and disruption and your church, among so many others, is likely to have adapted magnificently to a new way of doing things out of necessity.

So now can be a crucial time to make changes that are more far-reaching, cementing the positive changes and opportunities you have seen through the hardship of lockdown. Not doing that will mean not only losing a tremendous Kingdom opportunity for change and growth, but also wasting your hard-won good work of the last several months.

We should not try and go back to the way things were. For one thing, it will be impossible. For another, there are too many opportunities ahead that would be missed in doing so.

pray discuss act

So how do you move forward? We're going to suggest three stages as you respond to each topic:

1. pray
2. listen
3. act

These stages aren't isolated. It's not a case of stopping one stage when you go on to the next. They overlap on build on one another. Pray, then add in discuss, then start to act, each while you continue to do the previous ones.

Although the first two stages are important, don't get stuck in prayer and discussion and take too long to act. A moving ship is much easier to steer. Once you have a sense of a direction, go ahead

and start to move while you continue to pray and discuss. Adapt as you go. Flexibility will be very important, because things will be constantly changing.

At the end of each section in this resource, there will be suggestions for areas of prayer, topics of discussion and possible actions that you can take. Use and adapt these suggestions as you like and as you find helpful. Each of these will be marked with icons to make them easier to spot:

**Pray**

Areas for you to pray about.

**Discuss**

Topics you might like to discuss in your PCC or leadership team, in small groups or in the whole church.

**Act**

Actions that you might like to take to move forward in this area.

going further

You may look at the pray, discuss and act ideas and think, “Well, that’s pretty basic and obvious. We’re already doing all of that.” If that’s the case, that’s great! We hope that’s an encouragement to you – sometimes when you might think you’re not doing a good job it’s good to be reminded that you are. So please don’t hear, “You should do more!” Instead, it may be right to simply hear God say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Thank you for all you are doing.

However, you may want to look beyond these starting suggestions. If so, the ‘going further’ part of each section is for you. Here you’ll find resources, ideas and contacts to help you explore. If you’re looking for more general help, however, here are some pointers.

For training opportunities in the Diocese, you can go to:

Learning in Faith

A broad and varied series of learning opportunities and off the shelf resources designed to help you grow in your understanding and experience of faith so that you can more confidently engage in your communities and serve a world so desperately in need of God’s Good News.

<https://derby.anglican.org/en/training/learning-in-faith.html>

Discipleship Training

A series of more in-depth modules on discipleship training that can lead to qualifications:

<https://www.discipleship-training.org>

contacts

The Discipleship Mission and Ministry Team is based in Church House (although we’re mostly working from home our phone numbers and email should get through to us) and we’re here to help. The table over the page gives a quick summary of who we are and the areas we cover. Feel free to give us a ring or drop us an email – we’re here to support you.

We’ve also included particular contacts specific to the topic at the end of each section.

the discipleship mission and ministry team

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how is your church doing?

Before you think about how you should move forward, it's worth taking stock for a moment. We listened to many church leaders through individual conversations and chapter and synod meetings throughout May and June. From those conversations, we can paint a general picture of the mood and morale of the church. Your church's voice may be similar or different, but whatever it is saying, it is worth taking the time to stop, listen and respond to that voice. Here's what we heard.

responsive church

We found a picture of church leaders and congregations rising magnificently to the challenges presented by the pandemic.

- Over 70% of churches are now doing some kind of online church
- Large numbers of new ministries have started in response to the needs of communities
- Churches have coped well and accepted high levels of change and adaptation
- Some are relishing new challenges and taking new opportunities for mission
- God's people are showing creativity and imagination in how they respond

If you recognise your church in these statements, you're a part of that picture. Thank you for responding so wonderfully to the world's challenge and God's call.

the cost of change

However, conversations with churches reveal that this response in the midst of already difficult circumstances for congregations and individuals has come at significant cost. We have found:

- concern over financial sustainability
- being overwhelmed by more tasks and diminishing ministry resource
- high levels of stress caused by change, loss of relationship and loss of community
- concern for the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of congregations
- fear of implementing complex and changing processes for hygiene and social distancing
- worry over the pressure from the public to resume
- grieving for established and precious traditions of worship, fellowship and care
- confusion about the legalities and theology of online church

Understandably, the horizon for many churches and church leaders has contracted. From looking ahead and planning for the future, many churches are simply focusing on getting through to the next Sunday. That is completely understandable and expected.

It's important, even in the midst of the pressure of dealing with ministry, that we give space to acknowledge these costs, that we are aware of one another and that we're kind to one another.

pray discuss act



Pray

Pray for those who are under particular strain because they are carers, in difficult home situations, are dealing with ill health or who feel overwhelmed.

Ask God to give you wisdom in knowing where you might need to offer support, care or space to those who minister in your church.

Ask God to show you what he might be teaching you as a church through these times.



Discuss

Discuss together what the particular points of strain are for people who are ministering in your church. Are they the ones that are mentioned above, or are there new or different ones that you can identify?

Who are the people about whom you are particularly concerned, and what might be done to help them? Who is feeling overwhelmed?



Act

Ensure that everyone who is serving has someone to go to for help or conversation and make sure that no one is ministering alone without support – a regular phone call and catch up goes a long way and helps to spot difficulties early.

A lot of the things causing strain will be out of your hands, but there may be some things that you can do. If someone is struggling, try and find others to help, or consider whether some or all of what they are doing might be laid aside. Is it essential, or could it be left to another time or done in a different way?

going further

For information about clergy wellbeing, contact:

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mission and evangelism

Yes, you can still do mission and evangelism in this 'new normal'! In fact, we have new opportunities, with a more flexible church that's more used to change and a society that is looking for comfort, love and community. It's tempting to say, 'Well, we can't do what we did before, so we won't do anything.'

The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner said,

The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith.¹

Mission is core to the calling and purpose of the Church of Christ; it is fundamental to who we are. So, not only *can* we still be engaged in mission and evangelism, even in these trying times, we *must* be engaged with mission. Not to do so is a denial of who we are called to be.

But how, when we're not seeing anyone?

In many ways, the principles of mission haven't changed. We're still seeking to help people glimpse the Kingdom of God and to see lives and communities transformed by the love of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ. It may not seem like we're making contact with people anymore and that we're all locked down, but we are still making connections with people and communities. In some ways our community connections have actually increased. That's a part of mission.

open for mission

As we start to open our church buildings it's worth considering whether we are ready to invite in and welcome newcomers – those who don't normally come to church. There may be many who have started to come to our online services and might like to come along to the physical version.

As we open, we can find ways of ensuring that those who are not part of the existing congregation find it as easy to come, by making sure they're invited (through the online service), that it's easy to find out what they need to do (for example, if they need to tell you they're coming) and that you've got a welcome ready when they come.

The Church Print Hub have some great resources to help make that invitation and welcome easier and posters so that you can advertise outside the church, if that's appropriate for you (<https://www.churchprinthub.org>).

the five marks of mission for today

The Five Marks of Mission, developed by the Anglican Consultative Council and adopted by the House of Bishops of the Church of England, are a great place to start. To illustrate that you can still do mission in this new situation, we'll look briefly at the five marks of mission and find one or two examples of how you might engage with each one (if you're not already doing so).

Most of these ideas don't require a lot of extra effort or starting huge new programmes. They are simply about doing what we are already doing but with mission in mind.

¹ E. Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London 1931), p108

tell

to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

Although you're not physically meeting with people in the same way, you're still meeting. You're shopping, working, meeting with friends, much of that online. There are still opportunities for you to witness and share your faith with others.

You can also make sure that in your online services, you are always paying attention to the fact that there will be visitors and newcomers. You can ensure that each time you lead a service or preach, there is something of the Good News of Jesus contained within and an invitation to explore faith further (which means offering a 'next step', perhaps through a contact email address or website).

teach

to each, baptise and nurture new believers

We may not be able to have physical small groups, but we can still form those small groups online. With a bit of creativity, it's certainly possible to run a nurture course (Alpha, Start!, Pilgrim, Emmaus, Christianity Explored and many others) online through Zoom or a similar platform.

If you don't want to do a formal 'course', it's very possible to get a group of interested people together just to engage with Scripture together; read the passage, pray and discuss what the passage is saying, what God is saying to you through it and what that means for your lives.

tend

to respond to human need by loving service

You've probably been doing a lot of this already – but certainly we can do this for the wider community as well as for our own congregation. As we'll see, churches have responded magnificently to the needs of their communities.

There are huge needs and huge opportunities to serve, for example through supporting food banks and simple acts of kindness like doing errands for those who are shielding or befriending the vulnerable and isolated (maintaining social distance and hygiene measures, of course).

transform

to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

Many of the same needs for justice still exist and we can support these now the same as ever. The issues might be local, national or global, but in times of crisis the weak and the voiceless often fare worst. We can speak up for those people today. Campaigns like Black Lives Matter show that there is much to do, both in challenging others and challenging ourselves.

treasure

to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

The lockdown has meant that the carbon footprint of our society has reduced significantly, but we can still be thinking about how we can reduce it further and permanently through using recyclable materials, local products, reducing our energy footprint and using 'green' power suppliers.

The energy footprint tool is available to every church through the Online Parish Returns system to help you understand more about your energy usage.

social distance without being socially distant

Although we may be in partial lockdown and socially distanced, it's still possible to do social events to which you can invite newcomers. How about:

- an online quiz night
- a socially distanced ramble and picnic
- a newcomers' Zoom chat after the service

pray discuss act



Pray

Pray for your local church congregation, that they would be bold in proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and showing the love of God to the friends, colleagues, neighbours and others that they meet day to day.

Pray for the people of the communities you serve, that they would hear and respond to the Good News of Jesus.

Pray that God would show your church new and fresh ways to declare the love of God in the world.



Discuss

Discuss together what you are currently doing in each of the five marks of mission as a church. What is stopping you from being more missional as a church? How might those barriers be overcome? What opportunities for mission could you take, even in this current situation?



Act

Put measures in place to ensure that newcomers can be welcomed into all that you do and can feel a part of the church (see below).

Find one thing the church could do differently to ensure that they are engaging in mission in each of the five marks.

Ensure that, in each service and sermon:

- you are aware of visitors and make them feel welcome and comfortable
- you share something of the Good News of Jesus
- you offer an invitation and an opportunity to explore faith further

going further

We've got plenty of training and resources on doing mission and evangelism available from the Diocese. You can find many of these through our Mission Action Planning resources (go to <https://derby.anglican.org/en/our-mission/mission-action-plans-map.html>).

What Is Mission?

A leaflet that introduces mission as a discussion, for PCCs and small groups

https://derby.anglican.org/download/2272_f19a2623b2ecbc8f06837bae7cfc71be.html

The Five Marks of Mission

An introduction to the five marks with discussion points and Scripture references, for use in PCCs and small groups

https://derby.anglican.org/download/2271_823b15cfd8e9f89fecb04e9d0040ecd2.html

Talking Faith for Ordinary People

A webinar helping people to speak to their friends and neighbours about their faith (especially if you find the idea difficult) – contact Jason Kennedy (below) for details

Sharing the Good News

A resource that helps churches to develop mission strategy. There's a webinar (contact Jason Kennedy for more information or see the Learning in Faith Programme) or a written resource:

https://derby.anglican.org/en/our-mission/mission-action-plans-map/stage-4-prepare/download/2797_53e61f499079080636f2e054d4012770.html

contacts

For information and advice on any mission related topic, contact:

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For information on fresh expressions and pioneering, contact:

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serving the community

So that's how things look now. If we start to look to the horizon and beyond, what might we see?

emerging from lockdown

If we initially thought that this would take a few months and then we would get back to normal, we know now that won't be the case. At the time of writing, it seems likely that there will be many months where restrictions may be relaxed but social distancing and hygiene measures will still be in place. Added to this is the real possibility of spikes and consequential local lockdowns, or even a national lockdown in the event of a 'second wave'. What will eventually break this is the advent and wide distribution of a vaccine, which current best estimates place in the first half of 2021.

That means two things for us as a society and particularly as local churches.

1. Where previously the best solution might have simply been to cease many ministries and wait until lockdown ended, that is now no longer the case; we cannot tread water for that length of time without stagnation in many areas of mission and ministry. We will need to find new ways of doing what God is calling us to do.
2. The medium to long term impact on the Church and on the communities she serves will be deep and long lasting.

Each local church will need to face these impacts honestly and deliberately, ensuring that the effects of them are not ignored but rather are accepted and dealt with appropriately.

One thing is clear. 'Going back to the way we were' will just not be an option. We will need to move forward as a changed people and find new ways of doing and being church.

effects of the pandemic

In May of this year the Bishop of Tonbridge, the Right Reverend Simon Burton-Jones, spoke in a webinar entitled 'Culture After the Virus: Anticipating Our New Context'. He outlined ten potential ways in which our society could be changed as we emerge from the current crisis.

It's worth noting that his eleventh point was that he might be wrong in all of them! Predicting the future is difficult at the best of times, but these are sensible assumptions from a wise and measured source. Whatever the impacts, they are likely to be the most profound since the Second World War.

Here are the ten he covered, in brief:

1. **We are more socially contagious than the virus is biologically contagious**
The contagious nature of Coronavirus has, in unexpected ways, modelled the Gospel's reach and the potential to see the Good News 'caught', simply through understanding the power of relationship and connection.
2. **Caring for the human body generates lasting trust**
Those who work around words are less trusted (politicians, journalists), whilst those who care and protect practically are more trusted (doctors, nurses, armed forces). We must be a people of more action alongside our words.

3. **There will be a resurgence in grass roots creativity**
The rate of volunteering has increased dramatically and there is a renewed willingness to get in and help. Harnessing that energy and altruism is a key opportunity.
4. **There will be a growth in the precariat (those without job, home or life security)**
Job losses during the pandemic will be accompanied by a significant economic downturn. For some it will be too late to retrain. We will need to enable discipleship for those with little time or resources who are trying to hold down two or three jobs to survive.
5. **Mental health will be (even more of) a key issue**
The virus has had a significant effect on mental health, through loss, isolation, change and disruption. There will be a need to respond with the authenticity and honesty that all people, and particularly millennials, will demand.
6. **Generational fractures will widen and hurt more**
Younger generations are likely to be significantly less well off than their parents (against expectation), breaking the generational covenant to 'sacrifice for the younger generation'. This may lead to division, disconnection and resentment.
7. **It's time to reassess touch**
Systematic sexual abuse, and then #metoo, has led to an increasing distrust of touch. The aftermath of the virus is likely to add fear and anxiety to this. How we administer care and compassion in new ways will need to be considered.
8. **Extremists can spot a market opening when truth is on the slide**
People will begin to question whether or not experts and leaders can be trusted, particularly at times when these groups are perceived to have deliberately lied. This leaves the field open for 'my truth' (rather than 'my story') and alternate claims about subjects such as climate change, vaccinations, pandemics and religion.
9. **The existential is back**
There is evidence of a large increase in people wanting to know how to pray, and perhaps the emergence of the 'Nicodemus generation', approaching 'in the dark'... using online worship to avoid the high bar of entry to a church that is strange and unfamiliar.
10. **Life in second gear may be more valuable than we think**
We have jettisoned Sunday as the Christian sabbath some while ago, but the pandemic has shown us the value of sabbath once again; some are asking whether there is benefit in slowing down, unplugging and connecting with family and friends.

a resurgence of faith?

We have seen already that there has been a significant renewal in interest in prayer.² Those arguing for a resurgence in churchgoing following the pandemic would refer to a quote reputed to come from a sermon by a chaplain during the Second World War; "There are no atheists in foxholes." So, does that mean we'll see a large number of people coming back to church after lockdown?

Sadly, without action from the Church, the answer is unlikely to be yes. Why is that?

² The University of Copenhagen cited in a study that during April 2020, searches of the word 'prayer' on Google doubled for every 80,000 new registered cases of COVID-19. Similar figures have been found in the US. www.prayer.com is increasing subscribers and revenue significantly.

- The age profile of our church congregations puts them at higher risk of serious illness, having to shield or even, sadly, of succumbing to the virus.
- Churchgoing is a habit. The longer we are in lockdown, the more that habit is broken. Many church leaders have said that their congregations have become more comfortable with church at a distance. Some are not assuming their church building will reopen.
- People, even when they can go back after the lockdown, will be anxious about attending large gatherings and being in close proximity to others. If they do go back, it will be to a very changed experience in many ways. These things may well keep them away.
- Our society has a great interest in spirituality, and that interest has certainly increased. However, that's different to an interest or trust in institutional religion, about which there is still a great deal of ignorance, fear and mistrust in the general population.

That all sounds fatalistic, and of course, every person is different. There will be some who will come back to church as a result of the pandemic, many others who stay away. However, a wholesale move toward churchgoing would seem to be overly optimistic.

That said, it very much depends on local churches and their response, both during the pandemic and after. If you have connected to communities and individuals in new ways during this time, for example through social action and loving service, or creative use of online services, you may well see people coming through these things back into church.

community engagement for changed communities

During the pandemic, new needs and opportunities for loving service have developed in our communities. Of course, we can't say what these are in your area. You will need to pray, listen and discover those for yourself, and then respond to them. But don't assume you know what the needs are, or that they're the same as they were before the virus. Here are some possible areas you might like to think about (again, with thanks to the Bishop of Tonbridge):

- **Ministry to care homes**, where there have been significant numbers of deaths, the levels of fear and anxiety among residents is high and carers are often under-resourced and low-paid.
- **Mental health issues** will be much higher in our communities coming out of lockdown. Churches will need to be aware of the pastoral needs in the community, and also the likelihood of conflict and division caused by fear and anxiety.
- **Deprivation levels have increased (and will continue to do so)**. There are a large number of job losses, particularly in areas like leisure, service and retail. Small businesses and those on zero hour and casual contracts are likely to be the most badly hit. With higher unemployment and fewer jobs, finding new work will be extremely challenging.

pray discuss act



Pray

(We're sure you already are, but) pray for those in your community who have been broken, bruised and bereaved through this pandemic. Pray particularly for those who:

- have lost loved ones and who have not been able to have a full funeral
- have been isolated
- are ill or are caring for someone who is ill

- are in professions that put them at risk, particularly in healthcare

Pray for your church's response to the needs of your community, that God would show you the areas in which he is calling you to respond.

Pray that God would equip and encourage your church in its response to the needs of the community.

You might like to start a specific 'movement' of prayer locally, either within your church or with others, to pray consistently and regularly through the pandemic.



Discuss

Of the existing ministries that your church has been involved in, which are the ones that are still appropriate? Which will need to change?

What new needs are beginning to emerge in your community?

The needs of the community are very likely to have changed over the last several months. How might you discover what these changed needs might be?



Act

Spend some time listening afresh as a church to your community. You can do this in lots of different ways, even whilst socially distancing:

- get in touch with local non-government organisations
- get involved with local community action projects and partnerships
- keep an eye on local news
- talk to friends, neighbours and local work colleagues
- use the internet to do web research
- ask congregation members who are involved in different areas of the community

Work out a plan and choose one or two ways in which your church can be involved in serving the local community. It might be as simple as running errands, making PPE or making contact with those who are isolated or vulnerable, or it might be partnering with others to support or run a food bank.

going further

Mission Action Planning for Derby Diocese has several resources that can help. Some of them will need adaptation, but with a little creativity there will be things there to use.

Community Audit Ideas

https://derby.anglican.org/download/2273_89bd1797547cc3cc7739192fad0b0875.html

Community Listening Exercise

https://derby.anglican.org/download/2274_dfecf4182a14e20311e38e9f1e8bde8a.html

Stakeholder Interviews

https://derby.anglican.org/download/2276_c1574fbc4b2de9cdf3dbfc8c2ed4cc79.html

For more information on Mission Action Planning, visit the web pages at <https://derby.anglican.org/en/our-mission/mission-action-plans-map.html>.

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encouraging new ministries and vocations

new people

In our research, we asked churches to tell us about the number of people who were involved in ministry (particularly any changes in that number) and about new and existing ministry outside the church (i.e. serving the community). Here's what we found.

Numbers of people involved in ministry in churches has stayed the same in around half of churches. Of the others, it's evenly split between churches that have seen a rise of those involved and a fall. So, many churches are seeing people step away from ministry.

That's perhaps not surprising. The average age of our licensed ministers (clergy and readers) is 65. Around 90% are over 50 and 40% are over 70. That means many are more vulnerable to serious illness and many of them will be shielding. Others are in themselves carers for those who are vulnerable. Whilst we don't have this data for our congregations, it's a fair assumption that the age profile will be similar, with similar consequences.

However, people are also stepping into ministry for the first time (or coming back to ministry after a break). More people are getting involved. New vocations are being explored, and that's great news.

new ministries

Only 20% of churches said that their existing community engagement has ceased altogether. Around a third told us that it has continued despite the pandemic, with the rest saying that it's been reduced. Given how severe the changes we've seen have been, that's something to be celebrated.

Moreover, we're seeing a huge number of new ministries starting up in response to the pandemic. We asked churches to give us a 'check mark' for every new ministry they were involved in – either leading, partnering with others, or supporting in other ways. There were just over 500 check marks in total, with over 40% being new ministries run by that church. There was a significant level of partnership, both with other churches and organisations outside the church as well. The sorts of new ministries we're seeing are:

- Shopping and / or delivering shopping or essential supplies
- Making contact with isolated or vulnerable people
- Telephone befriending
- Online support groups
- Food bank
- Delivering prescriptions

Again, that's an amazing achievement by the church in a time of crisis and difficulty, particularly given dwindling financial resources and reducing numbers of ministers in many areas.

encouraging vocation and service

The last few months of lockdown have seen an influx of new people involved in ministry, serving inside and outside the church. The church has, in many ways, stepped up and filled the gaps in providing friendship and comfort, support, deliveries of food and other essential supplies to the vulnerable, making of PPE and a whole host of other types of community action.

During the Second World War, with the men away fighting, women across the land came to work in factories and on the land. They sustained our agriculture and industry. However, when the men came home and the crisis was over, that all changed.

The real danger is that, in a similar way, once lockdown ends and 'the crisis is over', those who have newly started to serve will drift away, unsupported by the church, because they feel that they're no longer needed (or worse, the church tells them this is so). That can't happen. We need every person in the church to serve in the ways that God is calling them.

Your church is likely to have had significant reductions in its income over the last several months. It's the same for everyone. It is unsustainable to think that every church can have a vicar and that ministry will be mainly in the domain of the clergy. Instead, our clergy will need to become more and more enablers and encouragers of the ministry and vocations of others.

We will need each and every person to serve as God is calling them to and to dramatically increase the level of lay ministry being exercised in the church. Now, when people have stepped up to serve, is a great time to establish that pattern.

pray discuss act



Pray

Spend time praying for those who are ministering in your church, particularly those who have stepped into new roles or who are having to learn new skills or work in new ways.



Discuss

Helping everyone to find their vocation and to serve in the way God is calling them is vital. It will help them grow, it will ensure that others are not overwhelmed (particularly the clergy) and it will ensure that the church is able to do all that God is calling her to.

How are you helping people to explore their vocation and find a place to serve? Particularly, are you encouraging newcomers and new Christians to explore their vocation?

Which roles that are currently being done by a few key people in the church might be shared out more among the congregation?

How are you creating opportunities for people to find out how they could serve?



Act

Find ways to publicly thank and pray for those who are ministering in your church, perhaps in your notices and in your intercessions on a Sunday (or whenever you meet). This will help them to feel valued and it will help the church to recognise the work that is being done (it might even spur them to get involved).

Think about ways in which you could match people to areas of service inside and outside the church:

- help people to explore and share the gifts and experience they have
- draw up a list of roles and tasks in the church that might be shared or done by others
- regularly invite people, through Sunday services and teaching, to explore their vocation

Get to know the skills and gifts in your congregation by giving opportunities for people to share them with you.

Be ready to invite people into serving rather than simply 'appealing from the front'. People will tend to respond much more readily if they are invited – otherwise the natural assumption is that 'I'm not needed,' or, 'I couldn't do that.'

Ensure that people who are serving are properly supported with regular conversations and training. You don't need to do that training yourself – ask the Discipleship Mission and Ministry Team in Church House for information about the Learning in Faith programme or Certificate of Ministry Course and other learning opportunities (see below).

going further

There are regular events (online) to help people explore their own calling and vocation. You can find those through the Learning in Faith programme:

<https://derby.anglican.org/en/training/learning-in-faith.html>

In addition, you can look at the Discipleship Training options available, which can simply be audited or could lead to a qualification in ministry:

<https://www.discipleship-training.org>

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online church

Of course, one of the most notable new developments of recent months for many churches has been moving into online church (or digital church). Our worship services are the centre of our common life together in many ways. Not only that, but they provide a 'shop window' for newcomers to experience what being a part of the worshipping community is all about.

Online church is a vital part of our mission in these changed times:

- It provides a 'low bar' to entry for newcomers, who feel more comfortable joining an online community from the safety of their own known environment, without feeling like they need to conform to strange and unknown practices or that they are likely to embarrass themselves.
- It overcomes accessibility issues for many who are currently unable to access church; those living with disability, the housebound, those unable to make church at a particular time because of work or other commitments.
- It has a tremendous 'reach' in our modern society, with lots of people being familiar with online content (particularly among the young who are notably missing from our churches) and provides a new mission field for many churches.

IT literacy

If you're going to run online church, it's worth thinking about whether the congregation and the community will be able to create and access it, so we asked about this in the survey. People can be barred from access to online church for all sorts of reasons. It might be that they don't have the confidence or the skills. Perhaps, in more deprived areas, it's about access to a computer, or maybe in more rural areas the internet available or quick enough.

Although it seems that the majority of people in communities and congregations can access online church, there is still a significant minority who may not be able to. The average percentage of people reported as IT literate in communities was 68%; for congregations, that fell to 58%. There were more communities and congregations with higher figures than this than there were lower, but even so, we certainly can't assume everyone can access online church.

However, just because not everyone can access online church doesn't mean we shouldn't run it for the majority who can. For some, it will be the only form of church they're willing or able to access.

who is running online church?

Amazingly, over 70% of churches said that they were running some sort of online church. That's amazing, and it represents a huge amount of energy and effort in adapting and learning new ways of being church. Perhaps not surprisingly, churches that were larger and in urban areas were more likely to be doing so. Online church is also more prevalent in places where there is higher IT literacy, particularly in the community.

Interestingly, churches with a more catholic worship tradition are less likely to be running online church than those with an evangelical worship tradition. We don't know why that is. Perhaps it might be the subject of further work. It might be helpful to know if there are particular barriers to a church in the catholic tradition from running online church and, if so, how they might be overcome. Of course, it may just be coincidence.

the why and what of online church

Looking at the reasons churches decided to run online church, and the sort of online church they ran when they did so, is very revealing. It's worth taking some time to consider.

factors for choosing online church

The most popular factor was whether it was appropriate for the congregation – nearly three quarters of churches considered this. In fact, all of the top five factors were about the church. The community came much lower; only half considered accessibility for the wider community, and less than a third whether it was culturally appropriate for their community.

adaptations for online church

About 13% of churches said that they had simply taken what they do on a Sunday morning, with no adaptations, and then placed it online. In fact, around half made no or only minor changes. That's perhaps surprising, because online worship is very different to meeting physically. It's a very different medium and the people who typically watch online content are very different to those who typically go to church.

Think about the differences for a moment.

- The age profile for those attending physical church tends to be older; for online viewing, it's much younger.
- The style of online content is more informal and chattier, often with shorter segments and total lengths of well under an hour.
- Online content is more intimate, with the audience effectively being many individuals or small groups, rather than one large crowd.
- The relationship between presenter and viewer when online is more equal – you are a guest in a home rather than a leader on a dais. There is greater proximity – you are (sometimes literally) larger than life, instead of a figure in the distance.
- Those who habitually view online content will be used to moving image, colour and vibrancy, with less reliance on the spoken or written word to communicate.

These are just a few of the differences – no doubt you can think of more. These differences mean that, even for those used to church, online church doesn't work in the same way. For example, singing and saying liturgy together don't work at all well; on the other hand, you can include people and images from anywhere when you're online, rather than being constrained by a building.

In short, simply transferring what you do on a Sunday to online is unlikely to work well even for regular churchgoers – and even less so for those not used to church; and yet, there are so many things you can do online that you could never do in a physical service!

the congregation

So, who's coming? For the existing congregation, most churches are reporting that most of their existing congregation are engaging with online church (of course, it's often very difficult to tell!) However, when thinking about newcomers, over half are only seeing a few or some.

Even a few may seem surprising; after all, we don't see many newcomers in churches normally (in most cases). However, when you consider that the barrier to entry is so much lower, there is a huge opportunity to see newcomers come into this new sort of service. There's no travelling involved. You can be anonymous, rather than having to come into a strange building and stick out as a visitor and there's no fear of doing the wrong thing. Online church is made for people who are 'just looking'.

the platform for online church

We asked a range of questions about the content of online worship, including the 'platforms' used and whether it was live, 'simulated live' (recorded but with live chat) or recorded.

- The most popular platforms are Zoom, Facebook and YouTube for online services and Zoom, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger for prayer, fellowship and discipleship groups.
- There is a wide variety of service types; the most prevalent are non-eucharistic/non-all age, eucharistic, small groups and reflections/thoughts for the day, but all service types are represented.
- Group video chat is the most popular format, followed by pre-recorded and then livestream.

which platform is right?

Which platform and format you use can have a big impact on who comes and what works well. Online meeting platforms like Zoom work really well for the existing congregation. You can see each other and interact and it's much more engaging. However, it doesn't work for larger churches and it certainly doesn't work for newcomers. It's actually harder to join a Zoom call as a newcomer – you don't know how many will be there and it's like always being on the front row!

Livestreaming works much better for newcomers because they can be anonymous, but it's harder to feel a part of it and so fellowship and interaction is harder. It can even feel like 'Netflix Church' – just watching a performance.

Finding a balance is crucial. One solution is to use livestream with chat for the main service, making the barrier to entry low and encouraging newcomers, followed by 'Zoom coffee' afterwards, to which everyone can come and can interact. Breakout rooms can be used to mix groups and help get to know the congregation, or a separate chat for newcomers, where people are ready to welcome and chat to them, can be used.

encouraging engagement

Avoiding livestreamed church from simply being 'Netflix Church' is difficult. However, there are things that can be done.

- Make sure you make the invitation to those who are joining online church to take part in other aspects of church life, like online small groups or social events.
- Be careful as service leaders to engage with people in the chat and encourage comments – ask for prayer requests, respond to what is said. Having a chat host who can summarise and pass messages on is helpful (they can also help moderate in the unlikely event that someone is commenting inappropriately).
- Use interactive elements in services. Ask the congregation to do something and then comment about it, ask questions to which answers can be posted.

online church beyond lockdown

We shouldn't just see online church as a 'stop-gap' substitute for 'real' church, to be closed as soon as we can get 'back to normal' (even if that were possible). For some, online church will have become their primary, maybe their only, connection to the faith community. Having reached into this

new area of mission and ministry, it would be a tragedy to withdraw soon after. How do we make this a long-term proposition?

sustainability

Online church can be very hard work. That's okay while other things are suspended (like physical gatherings), but what happens now these things have started to open up again?

You may need to find ways in which you can do online church in a less labour-intensive way. You could livestream your existing church, perhaps with a chat host to engage with those who are joining online. Simple ideas like the service leader engaging with the camera and making eye contact, as they would do with the congregation, will help online joiners feel a part of the service. Alternatively, how about joining with other churches to run online church, or to share content like worship or sermons? Is this something you could do in your benefice, deanery or other grouping?

There may be folk in your congregations who haven't seen a way to serve or be involved before, but this is just the opportunity they're looking for! People who are 'techy' but not up-front people could help to set up and run your streams.

Perhaps, for you though, online church just isn't possible (or appropriate) – but another nearby church in the area is continuing theirs. How about partnering with them? Maybe you are that church that's still running online church and you can partner with others near you that can't. If this time has taught us anything, is that working together... works.

church online or online church?

Understandably, as you've started online church, you've may not have made many adaptations. You just needed to do something quickly in order to respond and it's hard to think about changing the content whilst you're still getting to grips with the technology. You've simply done church, but online. However, now that you're more used to the technical side, perhaps this would be a good opportunity to think about what you're producing for truly online church.

What is your purpose for online church? Who is it for? Is it outward-facing, or are you only focusing on existing members?

For those visiting church for the first time online, their experience of other online media will lead them to particular expectations; an informal, relatable and accessible style, short segments, visually stimulating. Our worship services do not always provide these norms.

When you start a new congregation or ministry, it's always important to contextualise – to make it appropriate for the people you're trying to reach. The online community is no different.

Streamed content on YouTube and Facebook is also produced at a surprisingly high standard (spend some time having a look if you're not familiar). While it's new we can get away with a slightly 'home-spun' and amateur look. Eventually, however, people will lose patience with poor production and will drift away. We should seek to offer worship at the very highest standards we can online, just as we do with physical church. It's a reflection of our worship offering to God.

a blended ecology

As you consider online church, you will also need to consider how it fits in with the rest of your common life as a church. How will people who primarily attend online church be connected into the whole of the worshipping community?

If you see online church as a part of the whole, you'll need to consider how you invite those coming to online church into a deeper experience with the church and with God. Discipleship, prayer, fellowship, service, even things like stewardship are important steps for anyone in a church community. How can you encourage and enable these things?

You might like to think about:

- inviting online church participants to get in touch by email and connect them into the communications of the church
- starting up a WhatsApp group where people can chat and pray for one another
- setting up Zoom small groups for discipleship, fellowship and prayer to which people might be invited
- offering opportunities to join in with other aspects of church life – perhaps socially distanced outdoor social events

You can probably think of much more imaginative ideas that will work well where you are.

pray discuss act



Pray

Pray for God to give the PCC or leadership team wisdom in knowing whether online church is something for you and, if so, the best way to engage with it. Pray through the issues raised as a part of this resource.



Discuss

Spend some time watching YouTube and Facebook videos. What do you notice about the format, style and quality of the content? What can you learn?

What factors did you use to decide whether to run online church? Were they the right ones, or might you reconsider in the light of the information above?

If you're not running online church, are there other churches in the area to whom you would be happy to point people who want online church, or with whom you could partner in producing content or services?

Who is your online church for and what is its purpose currently? Do you want to change these things, particularly as online church develops alongside other ministries? What might that mean for the content you have on it and the way you deliver it?

Who is currently coming to your online services? Are most people engaging with it (including newcomers)? If not, what might you need to change?

What do the format and platform you're currently using for online church mean for ease of access for different people – existing members of the church and newcomers?

How are people engaging with online church? Are they joining in with chat and getting involved, or are they simply passively watching? If the latter, what might you do to change that?

How could you help integrate your online church into the rest of the common life of the church – particularly after lockdown eases?

How will online church be sustainable once other ministries start to happen again? What measures might you need to put in place to make it sustainable?



Act

Carry out a review of online church considering all of the above questions.

Develop online church as a permanent part of your mission and ministry in a way that will be sustainable (or how you might partner with others to make this happen).

Decide how you will integrate online church into the whole life of your church, so that people who engage with it are able to fully participate in the worshipping community.

going further

There are many good resources out there about digital church. The people who wrote 'Everybody Welcome', which is a great resource about welcoming newcomers into the church, have written two follow-up articles looking at the same issue for digital church (both now and leading into the future). They're well worth a read.

Everybody Welcome Online

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/digitaltheology/EverybodyWelcomeOnlineUpdate.pdf>

Everybody Welcome to the Future

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/digitaltheology/EWTTFFinalMay29.pdf>

Church of England Digital Labs

The national Church of England Digital Labs team have a web page with a wealth of resources around digital church in all its aspects, including, a blog, newsletter a conference (October 2020 – online of course!) and regular webinars.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/church-england-digital-labs>

Diocese of Derby Digital Resources for Parishes

<https://derby.anglican.org/en/component/k2/digital-resources-for-parishes.html>

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conclusion

Although at the time of writing it feels as though we have lived with the pandemic for some while, realistically it is still very early to identify and assess its impact on the local church and the communities you serve. You will only just be establishing new patterns of ministry under lockdown and started to move into the beginnings of a 'new normal'; everything is still strange and new, and things are likely to change and evolve as time goes on.

The predictions we make may turn out to be wrong; the things we think important become less so, or other things we thought insignificant rise to the surface. There will be other emerging areas that we haven't even considered.

Whatever you begin to put in place now must be flexible and adaptable, so that you are able to move as nimbly as possible as circumstances change and as God moves.

Grove Books have the strapline, "Not the last word... but often the first." We hope that this resource might be that; not claiming that its contents are by any means ground-breaking, new or extraordinarily imaginative, but with the hope and prayer that it will be an early contribution to stimulate your thinking, prayer, reflection and discussion, leading to positive action. We feel our job will be well done if you read this and think, "Well, we can do better than that!" Particularly so if you then go and do so!

Above all, perhaps the most critical thing is to ensure that you are not caught as passengers in the wake of the inevitable changes brought about by the pandemic but, wherever possible, that you are ready and prepared for what may come.

However, in all this, we must remind ourselves that we cannot have control over everything and must leave some things in the safe and loving hands of God, who has control over all things.

Father, give us courage to change what must be altered,
serenity to accept what cannot be helped,
and the insight to know the one from the other.
Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)