



Diocese of Durham

Clergy Hangout Feb 2nd 2021

“Going long-term hybrid: issues around becoming churches with a physical and a virtual presence.”



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Who is in the room?

What experience are we bringing?



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**Are we living through a deep change in human society
...and the Church?**

**“If God spare my life, ere many years
I will cause a boy who drives a plough
to know more of the scriptures than you do.”**

William Tyndale



Issues

Benefits:

- Reach (10x normal physical congregation?)
- Reach to the “housebound” or those at a distance
- Reach to those who would not “come to church”, (including evangelistically). The “watchers and testers” ...
- On some platforms and for some parishes, the opportunity to offer new modes of worship
- Mainstream Anglican presence on social media
 - recognizable, sensible, accountable
- *Can be* simple to do.



Issues

Risks:

- Yet another b****y thing for the clergy to have to do
- How do we do this and do physical church?
- Can feel like a pressure – e.g. on-line preaching
- Will it keep holding people's attention if it remains "simple"?
- Cost of kit
- Legalities – copyright
- How do we disciple on-line?
- How do we monetize this?

"If we are going long-term, what is our acceptable level of production going to be?"

Here, we have improved the quality and the qualities of the online offering in incremental stages and we could keep improving (the BBC is probably our theoretical ceiling) but at what point do we say, "this is it, we think this is sustainable and will be effective in the mid to long term"?



Issues

Tactics:

- Team
- Feedback – and watch yourself [ugh]
- Prioritize – what, when, how much, not everything
- Dosh – monetize it
- Re-fresh



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A Few Resources

Church of England “digital labs”

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

Centre for Digital Theology, Durham Uni Dept of Theology and Religion

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/digitaltheology/>

See the separate sites for Pete Phillips and Jonas Kurlberg

Everybody welcome online (CPAS project – Bob Jackson/George Fisher)

<https://www.cpas.org.uk/browse-everything/everybody-welcome-online>

Premier [Radio] Digital

<https://www.premierdigital.info/>

Bryony Taylor

<https://bryonytaylor.com/>

Grove Booklets

MEv 131 Hybrid Church: Blending Online and Offline Community

<https://grovebooks.co.uk/collections/evangelism/products/mev-131>



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Group Wisdom – experiences and questions

1. **Where are we now??** Some feeling of having been very dis-orientated but beginning to re-orientate. Virtual church life was something of a lifeboat but now feels we are navigating to a new port.
2. **The future:** we will NOT go back to the pre-COVID world. And this is our choice. Too many gains. New audiences. Connection to the housebound. Anglican on-line presence. We have been “turbo-charged” into the future. Durham Diocese has done well (better than many other dioceses?) with perhaps 60-70% of churches offering something on-line. Remarkable achievement. BUT there is some anxiety about how we sustain a virtual presence alongside running physical church as well.
3. **Generational and social divides:** a feeling that these can be over-stated but clearly for some communities access to the virtual world is limited by poverty (clergy have first-hand evidence of this). Nb some broad experience that the material that has landed least well in lots of churches has been the children and young people’s virtual work. Is it just not good enough? Or are they switched off from virtual activities? How can we find out?
4. **Clericalism:** we identified a risk that because of the technology but also the mechanics of live-streaming or editing and broadcasting, that we were becoming more clerical in terms of on-line services. How do we delegate effectively?
5. **Feel:** there is a very different feel leading on-line worship live as opposed to recording and broadcasting. The latter feels more like a performance and there is some internal pressure to get that “perfect”- leads to much re-recording... Unwise.
6. **Growing Church:** how do we build relationship and community with the new virtual watchers? If some people are watching because they like the anonymity and distance, how do we work with that? How do we welcome those watching on-line? As possible to be unwelcoming on-line as it is in physical. Make a point of addressing the virtual congregation as well as the physical. What might be a discipleship journey for them? Is this a “pre-church” plant?
7. **Patterns of access:** significant numbers are watching later. How do work with this in terms of contact and relationship building? We note that people are watching a range of provision: some local because they want to join with their local church; some regional because of distinctives and quality (e.g. the Cathedral). Are folk church-hopping? Are we connecting with the “unchurched” or will they simply be baffled when they see one of our services? Do we need to amend our style for virtual church? There was some agreement that patterns of viewing have settled now.
8. **Chaplaincy:** virtual ministry forced on chaplains because workplaces often closed. Chaplains are reaching new people through the new tech. and making good connections. There is a different quality of conversation on-line (often deeper). But the workplace chaplains have been made aware of the huge need which the stress of COVID is generating.



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Group Wisdom - practice

1. **Make decision about priorities.** Intentional re-orientation.
2. **Start planning now for the future:** patterns of worship; mission on-line; discipleship; money.
3. **Give it a try:** “if you are going to do something, it doesn’t matter at first if you do it badly”. We are on a steep learning curve. New skills. Training **is** being provided.
4. **Sustainability into hybrid church:** play to local strengths; keep it simple.
5. **Team:** draw in young people and techies who may feel more at home in this way of being involved in church. Remember Asset Based Community Development. ABCD.
6. **Money:** crucial that the new on-line church is fairly monetized. Otherwise the physical church is unsustainably subsidising it.
7. **Mission:** make a point of addressing the virtual congregation as well as the physical. Be consciously welcoming. Develop a strategy.
8. **Style:** shorter attention spans on-line. People can leave very easily. **Tension:** some are coming because they are appreciating the familiarity of what is being offered. Others are coming out of curiosity and they may prefer a different approach – e.g more informal, shorter talking head input, more visual.
9. **Data:** FB will provide some analytics about who is watching what and for how long and who they are. Some clergy are paying for this service and using it as a way to plot where viewers are which can help tactical decisions.
10. **Self-care:** digital punctuation. TAKE BREAKS REGULARLY.



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Group Wisdom – on-line evangelism

1. **It can work!** Several parishes have run on-line evangelism and people have come to faith. In fact significant numbers of folk have joined in precisely because it is on-line for personal and geographical reasons. It is worth giving this a go. One beneficial side effect has been on deepening the spiritual life of existing church members who have attended.
2. **Recruitment:** done both within the church community and also by wider advertising. That drew in folk from beyond the fringe of the church. Again this was a bit scary but it worked.
3. Most common material used has been **Alpha**. Works fine on-line. Nb some folk having profound and unexpected spiritual experiences. [The group raised the question of what material is out there from a more catholic perspective?] nb Alpha Central at HTB will welcome participants from anywhere to their on-line Alpha courses.
4. **Practicalities.** Sessions tend to be shorter on-line than actual. Missing the physical relationship building so have to consciously put in other relationship-building techniques. A really valuable tool has been the use of **testimonies**. The personal element of this has been very powerful. Also use of visuals – note some of the links to video sites. Some of these are helpfully oblique.
5. **Follow-up.** Groups often keen to keep meeting. Plan ahead for the next part of the journey. Nb really sharp question about how to form these groups into “church”, especially when geographically distanced. How would they cope with physically gathering? And how do we weave sacrament into these new Christian communities and lives...



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On-line evangelism resources

Evangelism and Discipleship Team

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/evangelism-and-discipleship>

Thy Kingdom Come

<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

CPAS

<https://www.cpas.org.uk/browse/events>

<https://www.cpas.org.uk/browse-everything/everybody-welcome-future>

FX Associates Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/freshexpressionsams>

CMS Missional Communities

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/missionalcommunitiesandprojects>

Alpha

<https://www.alpha.org>

<https://www.alpha.org/catholic-context/>

And some testimonies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VD3rld4RUXc>



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On-line Evangelism Resources contd

NOOMA - Rob Bell (thoughtful short videos)

<https://www.studygateway.com/watch/nooma>

24/7 Prayer

<https://www.24-7prayer.com>

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Loretto Movement (RC Charismatic youth movement)

<https://loretto.at/portfolio/london>

<https://www.24-7prayer.com/blog/2778/who-are-the-loretto-movement>

Hope Together

https://hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/302985/Web_2019.aspx

This is a link to the Evangelical Alliances testimonies page and resource bank:

<https://www.eauk.org/great-commission/resources>

<https://www.eauk.org/great-commission/stories/all>

Claire Elwood writes: Michael Moynagh developed a great little app a couple of years ago, called **Godsend**. <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/tag/godsend-app/>
This link gives a good idea of its content. It's easy peasy to use and says so much about mission in a nutshell.

For those developing a fringe online worshipping community of spiritual seekers or post Alpha people, and looking for resources, there is some fantastic stuff available with <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/> for which you have to pay for a 12 month license but well worth it - their stuff is well made, arty, accessible and the 2 films I used as part of our Ash Wednesday service were received well.