

Earlier this year, Wanstead Parish launched a new website, a weekly email reflection and upweighted its social media engagement, adding a Facebook page alongside its existing Twitter account.

The parish wanted to embrace the digital age and reach more people in our local community and beyond. It was seen as a vital part of our mission and outreach, particularly in a parish with a large number of young professionals and families.



Our previous website was not user-friendly, was unreadable on mobile devices, and was not regularly updated.

We are very fortunate to have, in our church community, some very talented and experienced digital and design professionals who freely gave their time and skills in developing and launching these new platforms.

Our website now carries fresh images that are warm, inclusive and show the vibrancy and diversity of the parish and its people.

Our Twitter account has, to date, 400 followers and is updated several times a week with images and information. Through it we are able to engage with the wider Church, charities and the local community. We are able to benefit from national campaigns like #LiveLent and #FollowTheStar, which help us with good quality and engaging content and we are regularly retweeted by our Diocese and the Church of England.

Our Facebook page is growing all the time and followed by people in the local community. It regularly reaches up to 4,000 people. We use it to promote community, as well as Church events. We have also started to boost content on key events to reach a wider audience and engage with new people.

More than 200 regular worshippers receive a weekly email containing a reflection on the upcoming Gospel, along with relevant images and music. It is family friendly, carrying a video and activities based around the Gospel, suitable for young children. There are photos of the week. Our weekly pew sheet and notification of forthcoming events are also posted in the email. This is widely appreciated and many have commented on how helpful, in their busy lives, they find the brief, meaningful reflection.

We love the "new" A Church Near You site. It is a brilliant improvement and works like another website for us. We would recommend it to any parish that doesn't have the means to run their own website. Many contacts come from non-church people through this site.

Wanstead Parish has noticed a greater engagement from the wider community since our relaunch; we are no longer just talking to ourselves! In this digital age, social media is the first port of call for many people who are searching; they can do so anonymously and without commitment. It is vital that what they find is relevant and up-to-date. We embrace this wonderful tool in proclaiming the Gospel in a way that is accessible to people of the 21st century.

There are challenges in having a digital profile. We see these as mainly around the availability of willing and able volunteers. Creating good content, maintaining, refreshing and updating is time-consuming, but absolutely necessary if the outreach is to be engaging and inspiring. In Wanstead Parish, we believe this is well worth it if we are to continue to "keep the rumour of God alive".

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### **Canon Ann Clarke**

House For Duty Associate Priest at Wanstead Parish

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