

The Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme seeks to create a growing Church for all people and for all places. Find out more about digital resources for churches in the [Digital Labs](#).

'We have to be ready for anybody,' says the Dean of Chelmsford Cathedral, the Very Rev Nicholas Henshall. The cathedral, resplendent with
aks to that.



We're looking for a way in. 'Round that way, I think,' says my friend. And, as we walk to the glass doors, they swing open automatically to allow us to enter. Even the doors are ready. It's such a surprise, such a contrast with pushing open heavy doors, or indeed finding a locked door, that we go back through and do it again, just for fun.

Not far behind us is a woman who looks as if she may be homeless. She's clearly a regular, making for a cleric in a far corner who is quietly serving coffee from an urn. They have a chat and she takes her coffee to a bench outside.

Bouquets of lilies left over from Easter assail the senses. By the ever-ready doors are leaflets for the coffee in the cathedral, a wine tasting and a performance of the Magnificat. There's also free wi-fi. Everyone is catered for here.

And it's that sense of welcome, readiness and something-for-everyoneness, that is currently being conveyed through the cathedral's social media.

Six months ago, mum-of-two Claire Snewin was simply a member of the congregation. Then, staff heard about her digital skills and today she leads a social media team, posting daily news and pictures on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



She knows her audiences, speaking to organisations via Twitter and individuals on Facebook and Instagram. She’s also got a clear idea of what she wants to do.

‘I hope that I can encourage new people into the cathedral,’ says Claire, ‘people who thought that there wasn’t anything at the cathedral for them. Everybody needs to be part of something, and the cathedral can offer that.’

This was particularly obvious at Christmas. Claire’s post about a Christmas carol concert at lunchtime reached 78,000 people, which is just shy of half the population of Chelmsford.

‘Three thousand people said that they were interested in coming,’ Claire recalls. ‘We were panicking slightly then! In the end it was standing room only with 850 people.’

The Christingle service, also featured on social media, attracted ‘five or six times’ the normal number of people, says the Dean, Nicholas Henshall. ‘We were asking people why they had come and they said “social media”. That’s when we knew that it was having an impact.



idea of the impact that it could have. I’m excited by it.’

One of those who's been more fully drawn into the life of the cathedral is Clair Bull, also a mother of two young children. Though she attended services at the cathedral, Clair says she had 'no clue what happened other than church on a Sunday' before the social media campaign began.

Now, she says, 'the cathedral is part of my life'. Her children attended the Stay and Play Lego sessions during half-term that had been advertised on social media.

'It's easy to share posts like that with my friends,' says Clair, 'and make people aware of the church without the stigma. People then realise that it's worth going to the Stay and Play day. They really enjoyed it.'



Also more involved is Jo Magwick. 'I don't go every Sunday,' says Jo. 'I can't, with children. I found it difficult to keep track of what's happening. It was all in a pamphlet. I relied on friends to find out what was going on.'

'I work in London. When I'm on the train, I look at social media and it's a good way to keep up with what's going on: not just the things that I can go to, but things that they are doing. I follow the Instagram page and the Facebook page. It's invaluable.'

Claire Snewin has 'exciting plans' for social media this year, including live broadcasts and linking up with the Church of England's Follow The Star initiative during Advent.

'Social media has worked so well here,' she says. 'Getting people here is just a small part of it. That people come and have a wonderful welcome means they are more likely to come back.'

And as she says it, the doors swing open again, and new visitors arrive.

Find out more about *digital resources for churches* as part of the *Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme*, aimed at creating a growing Church for all people and for all places.



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