

So often, we can feel the pressure to create clever content to reach new audiences. St John's, Lancashire, set out on a mission to use social media to forge real-world connections, and are a great of example of how simple questions can ignite conversations in a community.



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## The background

I'm a member of the congregation, PCC and digital lead at St John's Church, Galgate (Lancashire). Part of my role is to explore what discipleship and evangelism looks like in the digital space. We're a small/ medium sized church of 60 - 80 attendees on an average Sunday, with a small community we feel called to love and support as Jesus would.

Many churches have taken various approaches around what it means to do church online, however, we currently are exploring what encouraging spiritual practice would look like through social media. By this we mean, how do we encourage people to pray, study the bible and worship through social media. Of these, the easiest one to navigate is encouraging people to pray. We currently focus on Facebook as a platform as the demographics of Galgate aligns with Facebook's demographic.

## The post

We decided to start posting on a regular basis a post that simply said: "How can St John's pray for you right now?". Initially, we thought this would appeal to the Christians and congregation of our church to nudge a focus on prayer into their news feed.

However, we soon saw that several non-Christians (or at least non-congregation members) starting to message us with prayer requests. We've all been surprised that every time we've posted this we have always had a response (either publicly or privately). One story particularly stands out as our most successful outcome from these posts.

## The story

Jenny grew up local to St John's Church and went to the local church school. Although part of the church community as a child, she drifted away from religion as a teenager, moved away and got married. She tried church where she moved but didn't feel the same connection she once had. Unfortunately, Jenny's marriage broke down so she moved back to her hometown with her parents. After a while, she moved out to her own place but then really struggled with loneliness. During the [#FollowTheStar](#) campaign of 2018, Jenny came to church with her mum. Feeling like she would be unlikely come to the church again, she followed St John's Church on Facebook out of interest.

On a particularly emotional day for Jenny, with her divorce and work causing her stress she saw our prayer post in her newsfeed. Cautious about what to write, Jenny simply wrote: "I feel very lost right now, so the ability to find myself back on the right path."

Our ordinand Olivia decided rather than just reply to the message, it would be better to private message and offer to meet for a coffee and a chat. Olivia organised to meet with Jenny. This conversation helped Jenny see that the church wasn't such a daunting concept but somewhere approachable and a loving community waiting to love and support her.

Since then Jenny has rejoined the church, had her daughter christened and herself confirmed back into the faith. To quote Jenny: "I wouldn't be in church now if it wasn't for Facebook. I would have never had just gone to the building itself."

## Reflection and resources

One thing we've particularly reflected on is social media only goes so far. At the core of Jenny's story is a personal connection being created and real in-person community being forged. We've since started to view our social media presence as the facilitator for community, not the replacement.

We've posted content which tries to encourage real-world community and connection. For instance, we post;

These posts are designed to encourage conversations with the congregation on a Sunday morning, as well as non-congregational members to be invited into the conversation.

We measure success, not by the number of likes (although those highlight things going in the right direction), but measure success in terms of how much real-world connection and community is made. Find out about how you can understand Insights, [here](#).

All these posts are available to download (in various formats) below.

# Free social media templates

- [Free social media templates - Labs Learning](#) (51.34 MB)

## Geraint Harries

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