

The Church of England attracted its largest 'congregation' ever yesterday, in spite of the suspension of public worship in its churches to stem the spread of coronavirus.

The national virtual service recorded in the crypt chapel of Lambeth Palace and led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is estimated to have been seen or heard by around five million people.

This figure includes one million streaming on Facebook, with around two million likely to have tuned in to the 39 BBC local radio station broadcasts and BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship combined, based on usual listening patterns. The Facebook post had a further reach of two million and nearly 30 per cent of those watching online were under the age of 34.

That compares with average of 871,000 people attending services and acts of worship each week in 2018, the latest figures that are available. They do not include hundreds of churches and cathedrals that also livestreamed services yesterday across the country, some attracting several thousand viewers on the stream and playback.

A spokesperson for the Church of England said: “The Archbishops said that church would have to be reimagined. Across the country, local congregations did just that, meeting via video conferencing.

"People from around the world joined the service in the chapel on social media and by radio.

“Thousands of church-run social projects are responding to the newly created needs via foodbanks, homeless outreach and informal networks at a parish level. We'll continue to look at innovative ways of being Church.”

Meanwhile the Church of England's [Daily Prayer app](#) – offering Morning, Evening and Night Prayer – more than quadrupled in usage in the seven days since the suspension of public worship was announced.

The rise in demand comes as the Church of England expands the number of [digital and print resources](#) to support people praying at home and growing in faith in new ways.

More than 800 live streaming services were added to [AChurchNearYou.com](#) last week the Church's digital team has held webinars with around 200 churches to inspire and support them to use digital platforms to reach their communities during this time of social distancing.

The Church's “Time to Pray” app, which includes simple daytime and night prayer services, [is now free to everyone](#) and an accompanying daily audio offering on SoundCloud and iTunes was launched on Friday, with the Archbishop of Canterbury leading worship.

In addition to the #LiveLent reflections, which are available both in written and audio form, there will be a new series of mental health reflections.

Finally, [the Church's smart speaker apps](#) provide a range of prayer and other Christian resources for people to access at home. In the last 30 days the number of people using the Alexa app has risen by 70 per cent.

The Daily Prayer App: The app offers Morning, Evening and Night Prayer from Common Worship in both contemporary and traditional forms. All services [can be accessed online](#) and [the app downloaded free for iOS and Android devices](#).

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