

Lockdown has brought challenges, but also opportunities for churches to shape how they are meeting and engaging with their community. St Mark's Church, Pennington share their story of how they have responded to social isolation, and how it has opened up new opportunities within their community.

We saw the isolation coming, and so on Saturday, 7 March Paul (who helps with our tech), George (a member of our congregation), and I (the priest), spent the afternoon in the church to try and work out how we could make it work, to live-stream on Sunday, 8 March. We'd been recording and sharing sermons on YouTube for about 18 months already and [developing our Facebook social media engagement with the local community](#), so live-streaming was the next step.

We did not have all the kit we needed, so put out a post on our local community Facebook group asking for help and I contacted our neighbouring vicar, Peter, from St Thomas' Lymington. In the next hour, while we continued working in the church, repurposing bits of kit around the building, Alan from the pub turned up with an audio jack and mics, and Peter, the vicar from Lymington Church, came with a box of equipment from their church.

The local community have continued to help us sort out kit to record from the Vicarage. Someone donated a light, someone else lent me a laptop, and I have traded bags of compost for a sound mixer. Our local photographer films from our hedge and shares online. And a local guy helped us spec what we need for a decent camera, both for now and when we get back into the church.

The first Sunday, without letting anyone know, we had our usual 25-30 people in the building, and a further 55 joined us watching online.

That was just the beginning.

The platforms and tools we use

We use YouTube to live-stream our services and promote on Facebook by [creating Facebook events](#) with the link to the live YouTube video.

[Learn how to schedule a live YouTube video.](#)

Our congregation mainly watch on YouTube, however, for those without internet we stream the YouTube video to a Zoom meeting and share the [Zoom dial-in number](#), so that they can phone in and listen to the service every Sunday morning. Every few weeks, we now also burn the videos on DVD and share with our community.

After our Sunday service, our regulars are invited to join us on Zoom for coffee after church. That first Sunday, coffee started at 10:30am. I think I left the meeting at about 1:30 pm.



Teleprompter apps

Through a clergy Facebook group, I discovered teleprompter apps. I now paste my 'script' into an app on my iPad, which hangs on a string, near the camera mounted on a tripod. Now it is far easier to lead the service speaking to the camera.

Find these apps on:

- [Google play](#)
- [Apple store](#)

Editing tools

For Palm Sunday, we'd been planning a gospel reading in church that used different voices within the church to tell the story. We continued with this plan online. We also decided to work together with Lymington Church across two parishes and six usual congregations to put together one service a week. So, George spent hours on zoom with people from across both parishes, to individually record their contributions, and Paul edited all 156 snippets from 20+ people to create our passion gospel reading.

- We use [DaVinci Resolve](#) for editing our videos. It comes as a free paired-back version or paid with additional features.

Monitoring engagement

During our live-stream, we assumed people might drop out in the sermon, or during communion, but, we only get a significant drop out when we get to the last hymn. We reflect together after the services and based on engagement thus far, we made the decision not to go with the conventional wisdom, which says shorter is better. Our services are the usual length that we would have in church on Sunday.

[Learn more about YouTube analytics](#)

It's opened up new possibilities

We continue to stretch our thinking of how we involve our church community in leading services. 95-year-old Priscilla, who comes to Evensong, recorded a reading through zoom for Holy Week. 70-year-old Dorothy, who has no internet, stood at her front door so that Jane could stand at the end of her path to record Dorothy's reading whilst on her daily walk.

Probably one of the favourite services for me was the Easter Vigil. I decided to invite some of the inspirational, nurturing and encouraging women in my life, to read. Having put the service together with these amazing women, I later noticed something very particular. Those inspirational women include one who is a carer for her very elderly housebound mother, who hasn't been able to physically go to church for a few years; another who uses a wheelchair; another who would usually be in her church holding in the tics of Tourette's; and another who has a significant heart condition and was physically unable to go to her church before lockdown. If we are willing to let it, this season opens possibilities not only for who can 'come' to church, but also for who can *lead*.

Online donations

Our cash collections in St Mark's Church are usually less than £30 a week. Now each service we include a link to our online donations page, and we've started to get people increasing giving and signing up to PGS too, including some additional anonymous donations.

[Use A Church Near You to receive online donations.](#)

It’s gone a lot further than Pennington

We started working together with our neighbouring parish, St Thomas Church, Lymington, so some of the people who watch have come from both our communities, but, it's gone a lot further than that. And, not just my Mum and her husband in Waterloooville, watching with a phone next to the tablet, so that Janet down the road can listen in too! We are aware of people in other parts of the UK, as well as in other countries. Recently we had someone from the Philippines.

We will continue working together as the churches in Pennington and Lymington, to share God’s light in the communities here and beyond. We’re currently working on plans for our local VE day event, Ascension Day in crochet (yes... it’s likely to involve a crochet cloud and two feet sticking out), Thy Kingdom Come and a quiet day. Lymington Church is leading a prayer course, and we’re reflecting together to see which way the spirit blows and what emerges next!

Rev Rachel Noel

St Mark's Church, Pennington

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