

A church has seen 12 new people come to faith - and a family seeking baptism - after the coronavirus forced it to develop an online presence.

The Eucharist is consecrated by a vicar

Before lockdown, St Peter's in East Blatchington, Seaford, East Sussex, had minimal online presence - even the e-newsletter was a recent novelty to some.

Yet, within days of the Government restrictions being imposed, it had swung into action.

For the Revd Arwen Folkes, the Rector, the first step was being filmed by her son celebrating the Sunday Eucharist on her mobile.

"I'd never made a video or streamed anything before," she admitted. "My son had to teach me about YouTube channels."

However, she was soon filming compliance each evening and the numbers of followers on St Peter's [Facebook page](#) jumped from 50 to 230.

"They're from around the community and beyond," Revd Folkes explained.

"This is not an audience, it's a congregation."

"We are a hybrid church now."

"This is our future. I do not think we will be going back to what we were - this experience has changed us."

Even at the height of lockdown there were multiple streamed services for Holy Week and a Corpus Christi procession through the parish - made up of Revd Folkes's household.

As lockdown restrictions were eased and physical services resumed, the registration system, linked to test-and-trace, brought forward new names and families.

"We've had 12 people asking to come to services and some of them telling me they have found faith or rediscovered their faith through the online content. We had people message us saying they so appreciated the reflections and preaching," said Revd Folkes.

A vicar performs Mass outside

A family from outside the parish have also been in contact seeking baptism for their children.

"I feel so humbled because through us being a little brave with online services, the Holy Spirit has been alive in people," she said.

"In my parochial ministry I would always wear my dog collar around the parish seeking to be visible to all and the online presence has the same dynamic."

"It offers a friendly and personal face of the Church," she said. "If I go into town a good number of people come up to me now and say, 'I've been watching online.'"

"I am genuinely excited for the future as we open more. I have this great sense in my soul that the best is yet to come."

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