

At the beginning of 2020 I wrote a long-read blog exploring how churches can reach and engage different audiences of people on social media.

Since publishing an article on personas in February 2020 everything has changed enormously with the coronavirus pandemic, and Church of England churches have done amazing work to utilise digital technology to share the Christian message of hope with a range of groups. This has been coupled with a fantastic approach to both online and in person services and events, when permissible.

[Comfort and Joy logo](#).

In September we launched [Comfort and Joy](#), the Church's Advent and Christmas theme. The aim of this blog is to explore how church leaders can most effectively use [the national resources](#) produced with a range of different audiences throughout December.

[Comfort and Joy](#) hold together the hope that Christmas will bring joy and celebration after a uniquely difficult year with an acknowledgement that – for those who have lost loved ones or livelihoods, or who are potentially still not able to be together with loved ones – it will also be the Church's role, both nationally and locally, to provide consolation, rather than assume everyone will be ready to join in jubilation.

Using resources with different audiences

The aim of the personas below is to show the value of the web and social media as places for people to find and engage with their local churches and Christian resources in December. Not all journeys are going to be the same and the below are examples to help you think about how you can make the most of the [free and paid for resources](#) that are available.

Regular churchgoers

Given Advent and Christmas are key moments to help people who are open to and exploring faith, alongside attending, how might your congregation help share your local services and events with their family and friends via social media posts? This is particularly easy to do if your church shares information about services and events on [Facebook](#) and other social media platforms.

Nationally, there will be a range of online services throughout [Advent and Christmas](#), produced in partnership with charities including Marie Curie, Christian Aid, Church Army, the Children's Society, Embrace the Middle East, and others. They will be published on this [page](#) and shared each Sunday of Advent and over Christmas through our social media accounts. We are encouraging people to watch these and share on social media so that as many people as possible hear the Christian message in December.

This series of online services has been created to build on the positive impact we have seen with services throughout the year, which have helped resource local churches and because we are seeing that up to one in five people watching regularly go to church infrequently or not at all (stats from the weekly service survey). In addition, a broad range of ages watch and engage, and analytics show that up to one in three viewers are under the age of 34 (2020 Facebook video analytics).

Similarly, and explored in more detail below, how might the range of reflections that have been developed with Church House Publishing help different groups?

Comfort and Joy booklet.

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Occasional churchgoers

A series of reflections have been written by a number of prominent figures for each [Sunday of Advent and over Christmas](#) which are focused on helping the occasional churchgoer and people exploring faith to go further in their Christian journey.

Contributions come from Kate Bottley, Jonathan Bryan, Bob Chilcott, Martha Collison, Archbishop Stephen Cottrell, Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani, Chine McDonald, Sally Phillips, and Archbishop Justin Welby. Booklets and other printed resources including bookmarks, Christmas cards and prayer cards are available to order from [Church House Publishing](#) that can be shared with people.

In addition, individuals can sign up for free to receive the reflections by email or download the app by using this page on the [Church of England website](#). This is a great way of helping people go further.

How could you share the printed booklets and/or digital reflections with people you know locally who fall into this group? Do you have an email list or can you share the national social media posts through your local accounts?

Clergy and lay leaders

As well as the resources that have already been described, the [AChurchNearYou Resource Hub](#) contains a wealth of free resources for churches to re-use including:

- Nearly three and a half hours of free Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany carols and songs from across the traditions that churches can use as part of online and in-person services and events. Music has already been downloaded more than 500,000 times.
- Customisable videos, images, social media graphics.
- How to approach online giving.
- Order of service templates.

[AChurchNearYou.com](#) has already received 50 million page views this year, and 80 per cent of visitors were on the site for the first time.

It would not be a Church of England digital team blog without encouraging you to register and make sure you have updated your [AChurchNearYou.com](#) page with your [Advent and Christmas services and events!](#) Lots of the national advertising campaign we plan to run in December will point to this key resource.

The aim of all this content, which has been created following lots of feedback from dioceses and local churches, is to help equip clergy and lay leaders to create the best possible experience for all your audience groups.

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Parents

A range of family activities have been developed to help bring Comfort and Joy to homes in December. The PDF can be downloaded [here](#) and it includes ideas around 'What brings you joy?' and 'Who needs comfort today?'. This content will be shared on the Church's social media accounts and in the free app and emails.

You could encourage families and individuals to take part in the craft and other activities and share what they have produced or how it has made them feel as part of an online service or event.

We are partnering with The Children's Society for a special Christingle online service and this will be streamed on 13 December from the Church's [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) pages. You might wish to encourage families to watch and you could host a special online event afterwards to bring a local flavour.

People exploring faith

For the first time this year we have developed youth reflections, working closely with the Archbishop of York's Youth Trust and the national Evangelism and Discipleship team. Prominent Christians have helped by recording short clips for this. They will be shared on Instagram throughout Advent and Christmas and materials from a range of Christian organisations and traditions will be added to the Church of England website to help explorers go further. Do encourage people to follow us on [Instagram](#) to find and engage with the content.

We are also added more functionality to our [Alexa and Google Home apps](#), which have proved to be popular across the age ranges, to help people engage with the core reflections, online services and other resources available. The skills have been asked more than 250,000 questions to date.

Groups without access to the internet

While the printed resources (including a Large Print reflections booklet) are a good way of reaching some audiences who aren't online, this year we are also able to share the content in free audio format as well. [Daily Hope](#) is a free phone number (0800 804 8044) offering music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. We are delighted that the Comfort and Joy reflections, services and some of the music will also be available throughout Advent and Christmas. This will enable as many people as possible to access the content we are developing. Please do share this number far and wide!

DailyHope phonenumber - 0800 804 8044

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Where to go from here?

It is very important to do a few things well rather than lots badly. The aim of this blog has been to help churches choose a few of the ideas from the above and put them into practice or to have provoked a few thoughts on where to go next.

Alongside the blog on [audiences](#) from February 2020, last year I wrote an article about how your church can think about developing a [digital strategy](#). Even if you decide to only focus on a few areas you should encourage buy-in from across the church, including the PCC.

As ever, I really welcome feedback on this blog so do send a message with any [comments or questions](#).

A huge thanks for all you are doing to bring comfort and joy over Advent and Christmas to your congregation and the wider community, particularly at such a busy and difficult time.

Adrian Harris

Head of Digital, The Church of England

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Women in a Zoom meeting with three other women

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Creating and administrating a church social media account

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