

Prayer services dating back to the early days of Christianity have enjoyed a big revival at a Middlesex church during the pandemic..

St Marys Sunbury on Thames is shown from the river in the morning sun

Daily Morning and Night Prayer, or compline, are attracting online congregations of more than 200 people at a time at St Mary's Church in Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex, since the first lockdown in England. Before the pandemic, Morning and Night Prayer were said by clergy in the parish usually without a congregation.

During the services, broadcast on Facebook Live, the ancient offices of Morning Prayer and Compline are read and traditional prayers like the Benedictus and the Nunc Dimittis are used. The online congregations are encouraged to make prayer requests and even send through suggestions for their favourite hymns. There are also prayers for key workers including those in the health service and prayers for those who have lost their lives to Covid.

Parish priest Father Andrew Downes said large number of people tuning into the services "from across the country and also overseas - are shielding. The services also give people the chance to join worship with their relatives and friends across the country during the lockdown.



"During the pandemic, many of us are feeling in need of a bit more understanding of the love of God and of spiritual nourishment. Morning Prayer and Night Prayer allow us the chance to offer our hopes and fears up to God at the start of the day and give thanks for what we have received as the day draws to a close," he said.

"I see some of the comments posted after Morning Prayer showing that people are lifted up and supported by it, they take great comfort from it. They are forming an online community offering support to each other"

"It is so heartening to see a growing appreciation for the prayer life of the church. Starting with the Desert Fathers, growing through the early church monastic tradition and being further shaped at the Reformation, the practice of pausing at the start and end of the day offers us as much comfort and hope today as it ever has done"

