

The Church of England's national online services alone have attracted more than 3.7 million views since the first restrictions on gatherings for public worship to limit the spread of Covid-19 were introduced almost a year ago.

Clips and content from the services have been seen 40 million times on social media channels.

The Church of England's prayer and discipleship apps – through which people can join in ancient services of morning and evening prayer from wherever they are – have been accessed eight million times, up 50 per cent on the previous year.

The figures for online services are thought to be just the tip of the iceberg as churches' response to the pandemic triggered a major change in the way Christians worship and reach out to their neighbours.

At least 20,000 services and other online events are now listed on the Church of England's 'church-finder' website AChurchNearYou. A year ago there were none.

And a special hymn download service, designed for local churches to use as part of online worship, has seen more than a million downloads.

As churches look ahead to an expected easing of restrictions and more public gatherings, many are assessing how to incorporate the lessons of the last year into their regular patterns of worship and outreach after the pandemic.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: "The last year has been a time of loss, separation and pain for everyone. Not always being able to meet together for prayer and worship has made that even more difficult and I long for the day when we can gather together before God's face.

"Yet amid all of this, God has been with us and has done something new which we could not have imagined a year ago. We have sung the Lord's song in a virtual foreign land. As we look and plan ahead it's not a question of either online worship or meeting in-person, but of how we will be shaped by the experience and commitments of the last year, to try new things, to value the things we perhaps took for granted before, and to reach out to more people with the invitation to participate in the good news of Jesus Christ."

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell said: "I think there has been a digital coming of age.

"Of course we long to meet in person, but online services can be very beautiful. People of different ages, from different parts of the country or even the world, families sitting together, people watching whilst having a cup of coffee are all coming together to worship online in ways that we just couldn't have imagined a year ago.

"Many churches report that they have more people participating in their online services than used to meet in person.

"Of course, I hope these new online worshippers will join us in person one day. But even if they don't, we must carry on nurturing these online communities and seeing it as a way of reaching out to new people and building new communities of faith."

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The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell

The first national online service was led by Archbishop Justin and marked Mothering Sunday last year. Since then there have been:

- 54 national online services – or 2,000 minutes of worship.
- 382 people have taken part in prayers, readings or reflections – including some very familiar faces such as Prince William and Pope Francis.
- 258 hymns, in a range of styles sung in congregations across the country and overseas.

Almost all of the services featured music from the choirs of St Martin-in-the-Fields who have also recorded a bank of hymns available for use by local churches through AChurchNearYou.

Many of those attending online services were worshipping for the first time.

A survey of some of the online congregation found 19.7 per cent of people asked were engaging with the Church of England online for the first time.

These national services have also been made available on the [DailyHOPE line](#), a free phonenumber that has been especially welcomed by those without internet access. The line has received over 400,000 calls and played five million minutes since it was launched in April last year.

The need to find new ways of meeting for worship amid lockdowns and local restrictions has also helped the wider public engage with a broad range of Anglican traditions. For example, Book of Common Prayer services have seen a large increase in people attending as a result of being available online.

As Easter approaches the Church of England is offering daily prayers and reflections, both online and in printed form, through the [#LiveLent campaign](#). It follows the Church of England's Advent and Christmas campaign 'Comfort and Joy' which was seen across social media 35.7 million times.

Amaris Cole, the Church of England's Head of Digital, said: "The last year has shown the incredible creativity of our local churches, which have worked quickly to engage with their communities, despite restrictions.

To support this, we've continued our [digital training for local churches](#) to use digital platforms, with more than 7,000 attendees attending webinars to learn skills such as how to live stream, how to turn their sermons into podcasts or use Facebook groups for their Bible studies.

"It's been incredible to hear the stories of those being reached through these online services.

“With the national weekly services shared on our [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#), we’ve been able to connect with people who may have never engaged with church services before and have seen communities form in the comments while these services are streaming on a Sunday morning.

“They regularly share prayer requests, ask questions about the Christian faith and offer to support others online.

“With services being led by bishops, chaplains, vicars and lay people, featuring classic hymns or worship bands, readings from television presenters and children from our primary schools, the diversity of the Church of England has been showcased through our national social media channels and we’ve ensured corporate worship is accessible wherever people may be.”

The prayer apps include the Church of England’s [Daily Prayer app](#), offering traditional services of Morning, Evening and Night Prayer, which was accessed 4.4 million times, a rise of 55 per cent. The [Lectionary app](#), which includes the calendar, readings and prayer for the Church’s year, was accessed 1.7million times, up 21 per cent. Meanwhile the Church of England [campaign app](#) which provides reflections for current #LiveLent campaign and the Comfort and Joy campaign during Advent and Christmas was accessed 700,000 times, an increase of nine per cent.

Others apps include [Time to Pray](#), which offers simple Daytime and Night Prayer services with audio, and [Reflections for Daily Prayer](#), offering daily Bible reflections, were each accessed 400,000 times; [Sunday Worship](#) which had 240,000 opens, and the [Reflections on the Psalms](#) and [Daily Prayer for Thy Kingdom Come](#) with 160,000 together.

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