

Busy crowd on street
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Online contact provides a novel context for the ancient mission of the Church, to make and grow new disciples. While mission fields look different, four key mission principles are universal.

Invitation and befriending

Anglicans are not always great inviters to church events and services. Perhaps we fear the barrier of the building, worry about the quality of experience, suspect everyone will be embarrassed and expect rejection will be painful. But an invitation to online church is more natural, more like recommending a TV programme. More Anglicans invited friends and family to church during lockdown, contributing to the growth in numbers.

While traditional leaflet invitations may have little impact except at Christmas, churches advertising a service locally through Facebook have seen big attendance increases.

Online gives huge new power to invitation and advertising.

When someone visits a church, we want to say hello and find out who they are. This is harder online because of the natural anonymity of the viewer. But many reveal their names through comments and likes so they clearly want to be noticed.

Churches should prioritise this essential first step on the journey from viewer to friend.

If someone makes a few friends in a church in the first few weeks they will probably stay, if not they may soon leave. Progressing from Facebook view to Facebook friend is good, but someone accessing a service online should also be offered face to face friendship.

The old challenge to help people grow as disciples of Jesus has new challenges online, but online participants should have the same opportunities as others to embed themselves, fulfil roles, contribute financially, and fully identify as community members.

Think and discuss

- Where is the biggest hurdle on the journey from observing to belonging in your church?
- How might your church welcome new people into faith and belonging online?

From viewer to believer

The 'Leading your Church into Growth' course ([Leading your Church into Growth](#)) asks participants to assess how many eggs their church is putting into each of the four evangelism stages of:

- Prayer
- Presence
- Proclamation
- Persuasion

Churches are usually strongest on presence (positive community involvement) and weakest on persuasion (talking faith and commitment one to one or in small groups).

Online strengthens presence inside homes, and proclamation if the sermon is listened to. Levelling up the persuasion element may be the main priority. Nurture courses online have proved workable and popular. Within weeks of its launch, there were 1,500 online [Alpha Courses](#) in UK churches. Other online courses such as [Christianity Explored](#) have also seen large numbers access them online.

Think and discuss

- What is the balance in your church between the four Ps?
- How can you best deploy them together for online mission?

From responding to planning

Lockdown made many church Mission Action Plans (MAPs) redundant. The new normal does not necessarily mean re-instating a MAP from a previous era. A new landscape requires a new MAP. Here is one possible planning structure:

- **Wider Doors** – Online has opened a new portal into the lives and living rooms of the nation. How can we keep our doors open and make them wider still?
- **Deeper Wells** – People have experienced shock, spiritual needs are deeper, the reality of death more apparent. How can we offer deeper wells of living water from which newly thirsty people can drink?
- **Smarter Structures** – A new online element requires new online leadership roles. The tech-savvy may need to be more prominent. Churches must work together, perhaps across the benefice or mission area.
- **Wiser Programmes** – Make lists of elements from the past you wish to re-instate, elements from covid-times you wish to continue and new elements you wish to start. Then make lists of elements from the past and from covid times you will not include. Unless these are substantial you will probably be overloaded and unfocused. Healthy churches do a few things well.

CPAS has [developed some helpful planning tools for post-covid church](#).

Think and discuss

- Would this structure work for your new church or benefice mission plan?
- Who are you trying to reach and serve?

From loner to team

Church leaders have spent Covid-time far outside their comfort zones on near-vertical learning curves. The way to put the enforced growing and learning to future use without burnout is to work in teams using all the gifts. Not all clergy should become tech experts, but all clergy need to find them. If they are not available in a local church, then help is needed from local people of goodwill or from other churches. More than ever before, churches need to work together to share expertise in a medium that naturally reaches larger areas than single parishes. One online service can be on the programme of several churches.

A new online church operation requires a new online church team with training and support made available. The team should be involved in the planning not just asked to implement someone else's vision. An online team could work through this resource to work out what to do, and why, and how to do it well. Dioceses and the National Church of England team will always try to help.

Think and discuss

- What should be the job description for your online team?
- Who should be in the team and how should they work and train?

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