

It's been more than a week since the Digital Labs conference where 465 people attended an online event for churches who want to use digital creatively and sustainably for their online and onsite communities. With 20 keynotes and Labs workshops, featuring voices from across the Church of England and the Christian community, the two day conference was designed to connect church leaders with skills and resources, as well as creating space for conversation and sharing of ideas. We hope attendees went away inspired and energised for the opportunities ahead.

Read on to hear more about the two day event.

Hosted on an online platform, Whova, attendees were able to attend live workshops and arrange meet-ups, just as you'd hope to at an on-site conference. Across the two days, 13 virtual meet-ups were held and 1218 messages sent between attendees, plus the 69 thread topics started on the day - showing how actively the community engaged with topics across the conference.

Photos of conference day eats were shared alongside digital evangelism tools - one vicarage cream tea had us all in envy. For us, the conference highlighted how the Digital Labs community has grown into a welcoming and encouraging community of church leaders from across the globe.

“A huge thank you for such a brilliant event - with so much and diverse professional input- and such a friendly, encouraging online culture! Well done! More of this, please!”

Chat comment from an attendee

Inclusion was one of the key themes from the event. During Friday's opening session, we acknowledged digital communications have enabled our church communities to become more accessible, by using online video and captions, amongst others. However, inclusion must go beyond this. How we can bring equality to online and onsite communities? The responsibility on us as church leaders to be intentional in services and events are lead for those in the building and those online, and how we involve both communities – how can we ensure those attending online can contribute and participate, if they desire to, and not just spectate? Tom Pearson invited us all to ask our communities, especially those who will be continuing to attend online 'how can we help you and how would you like to contribute?'

On Saturday, Debbie Clinton shared the [Vision for the 2020's, which you can read more about here](#).

and Nick Shepherd led a thought provoking Keynote on where is God when we are online?

The Labs workshops were a hive of knowledge sharing, from church leaders and Christian digital experts covering video, design, digital evangelism, social media storytelling and copywriting. In the Labs workshop on Digital Evangelism, this thought from speaker Onyeka Onyekwelu encapsulated for us the missional potential of online communications,

"I see social media as the digital equivalent of a town square. I grew up in Nigeria and I'm from a tribe called Igbo people. And, before any major event, what the town crier will do is go around and actually announce it to every single household. And that's how I see social media, except it's global. We have the opportunity to reach a global audience and announce anything that we choose to to the world. And that's why I use social media to share my faith."

@OnyekaOnline

The conference wasn't all about social media and livestreaming, we touched on raising funds, grants, digital giving, hybrid life events, church management systems and creative online worship amongst others.

"Thank you for the wonderful breadth of the conference - websites, worship, money, video shooting, etc..."

Chat comment from an attendee

The [National giving team](#), the [Life Events Diary](#) and [Engage worship](#) all held Labs workshops at the conference, sharing free resources and ideas for hybrid churches.

For the first time, we made all the recordings available afterwards and include in-vision BSL interpretation alongside closed captions. [Recordings can still be purchased here until the end of the month.](#)

[Lucy Grimble, Christian singer and songwriter](#), opened the conference for us in sung worship, perfectly framing the following 24 hours with the words of *In Christ alone*. A reminder that with the advancements we have made online in the last 18 months, and as we look ahead to what's next for the Church, our hope is not found in digital technology, but in Jesus Christ.

What's next?

We hope that through the conference speakers and the community that met online, the conference has been a spring board into what's next for your church community. After the conference excitement dies down, perhaps, you are thinking about how you can lead the conversation amongst volunteers in your church and move forward with ideas.

The Church's [Step by Step guide to Online and Onsite Services](#) starts with a series of thoughts and questions for you to talk through with your church leaders and volunteers. It's designed to help you think strategically as you plan ahead for the next six months, and consider how you develop your online and onsite communities.

[View the guide here.](#)

Some of the numbers from the two days

- Nine Countries represented, including England, Wales, Ireland, Italy, Canada, Singapore, Norway, Germany and France.
- 465 church leaders attended
- 20 live keynotes and workshops were held
- On average, every attendee went to nine sessions
- We had 12 exhibitors sharing their resources and special conference offers - [you can meet them here](#)
- 1218 messages were sent between attendees during the conference
- Attendees arranged 13 virtual meet-ups with each other over the course of the two days
- 61 community board threads were created on topics such as funding grants for churches, livestream tech, digital evangelism tools and - importantly - conference eats
- 10.5 hours of video content has been translated into BSL for the conference recordings. You can purchase the recordings [here](#).

Your highlights from social

- **Low Light photography tips for smartphones**

06/10/2021

[Low Light photography tips for smartphones](#)

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- **Seven ways to raise the visibility of your church community online**

04/10/2021

Church spire against a blue sky

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• **Graphic design tips for churches**

27/09/2021

Graphic design for churches

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Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/highlights-digital-labs-conference-2021>