

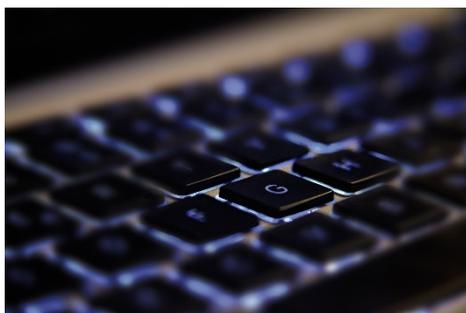
## Digital Outreach – Sharing Ideas for Social Action

On Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021, eleven parishes which have received Lottery funding for digital equipment met to share ideas and challenges. We are grateful to the National Lottery Community Fund for their support with these projects.

The meeting explored how parishes have used digital technology for social action and outreach work (as opposed to the normal religious activities of the parish). The following are some of the ideas shared and common challenges:

- Regular **online streaming of content** (such as talks and tours of the church) are a great way to connect with parishioners and others in the community who are isolating. St Cuthbert Mayne Launceston have a YouTube Channel and offer a virtual tour of the church for the local community. Parishes which have invested in new equipment are finding it beneficial in reaching their older and more rural parishioners.
- Using **Facebook** to connect with the local community has been used successfully by a number of parishes including Our Lady and St Patrick, Teignmouth.
- Using **technology to increase inclusion**, for example extending live streaming into the church hall, has increased capacity whilst maintaining social distance. This enabled a meeting in the church hall to be livestreamed to people at home so they can participate in a discussion when otherwise they would have been excluded.
- Most parishes were **live streaming important family and community events** such as weddings, funerals and baptism can enable wide participation (including from overseas).
- Using **Zoom for shared activities** such as social events (e.g. virtual coffee mornings) connects people who are housebound with one another, providing friendship and support. A number of parishes are already doing this.
- **Increasing participation and engagement** e.g. inviting parishioners to share singing or reflections and creating regular presentations that people might lead online – moving away from the Priest or Deacon organising everything.
- Using different ways to connect – e.g. **offering both e-newsletters and posted letters and phone calls** can ensure a parish reaches as many people as possible. Newsletters offer an opportunity to share important public benefit information such as recent statements on Vaccination or Caritas' guides on mental health and bereavement. One parish noted they were sending out double the number of paper newsletters under lockdown. Many of the most isolated are not using digital technology so this reaches an important group.
- Using the **parish Wi-Fi** to enable people to stream e.g. funeral services if the parish doesn't have the technology itself.
- A **parish blog** can help people in the local community feel engaged – it is a 'human touch' which enables people to feel involved.
- Offering **training and development** to parish volunteers and the local community for example training on safeguarding and using digital technology safely online. Parishes have trained stewards online.

- Connecting with local **schools sharing online material** and also sharing school videos (e.g. music or assemblies on particular themes) with the parish community. St Mary and Catherine have provided video messages from the parish to the school. Links with schools can also reach families. Material produced for schools can also be accessible for people living with dementia or learning disabilities.
- Including a **social element in addition to religious worship** such as coffee and chat after Mass or whole family catechesis. This creates opportunities for people who are isolated to make new friendships and connections. Exeter Blessed Sacrament Wednesday Word offers social opportunities after the discussion.
- **Providing devices for people who are isolated** to reconnect and talk to family members. Plymouth have been exploring this and can share the learning.
- Using **questionnaires to parishioners** to ask how they are finding the parish digital outreach – what they find helpful and what other activities they might like to see.
- Use the **Facebook analytics** to understand the audience and how to reach key groups.



There were also some **common challenges** which will be followed up to see what further support could be provided to parishes:

- Advice about copyright issues for playing music which is rebroadcast and possible payment to extend One License.
- More guidance on safeguarding and online safety – particularly when children are included in activities. Parishes would welcome more training.
- Guidance on GDPR e.g. permissions for newsletters, contacting young people, permission to video servers on the altar etc.
- A short guide to YouTube mobile live streaming.
- Understanding what constitutes good evidence for secular funders of projects.

Caritas Plymouth is grateful to all those who took part in the learning event. If any parishes have any queries or suggestions please contact us – [caritas@prcdtr.org.uk](mailto:caritas@prcdtr.org.uk) 01364 645421.

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