



St Paul's Wokingham

The Rev. Richard Lamey
Rector and Area Dean,
Sonning

Cost:

Approximately £3,000 for camera, computer, cable and churchyard excavation

Prior to the first national lockdown, all services at St Paul's took place face to face, with the occasional phone held up at a wedding to stream the service to friends and family overseas! Even this was tricky though as there was no internet connection in the church.

As church buildings were closed, Richard began live streaming services onto YouTube from his home. Luckily, his wife was a willing volunteer and helped him to incorporate music and readings into the weekly worship, supported by a Warden who did a lot of the preparation. They carried on in this vein, noting that the congregation quite liked the camaraderie of 'home worship'. As measures were relaxed Richard and the team realised that people were missing seeing the church in all its glory and his front room wasn't going to cut it!

Eventually, after 'some wrangling' with BT, the church was able to lay a cable across the churchyard, using the gravediggers regularly

employed by St Paul's. This was important: relatives of those buried in the church yard could be assured that the excavation work would not disturb graves. The buildings team at Church House were also incredibly supportive, approving the work needed very quickly!

The much improved connectivity allows St Paul's to stream services live, which Richard believes is important as you get a much stronger personal connection; "It's great to know that you're talking directly to people in that moment."

"We are a liturgical church and therefore the act and process of worship is extremely important to our congregation. By doing these things 'live' people really feel a part of the service and our bonds have strengthened as a result. We also make sure that for things like The Peace, people type in their responses on the chat bar – these things may seem small, but they are important practices and part of our community's faith journey."

Like many, St Paul's were keen to bring everyone along on their digital journey, so they enlisted the help of 'Bertie the Church Mouse', who has been extremely busy since March, sending out emails and how-to guides, ensuring easy to understand instructions are available to all.

Richard is keen to point out how

much of a team effort their digital transformation has been with the church administrator working closely with BT on the more technical aspects, volunteers taking on readings for services and the overwhelming support from the congregation, who helped raise the funds needed through an appeal. As well as this, one of the wardens has led a small team of people to put everything together week by week and choir members have recorded themselves at home to give a soundtrack everyone can sing along to.

"Before the lockdown we didn't see the real need for digital capability, but we have been humbled by the support and engagement we have received, and by how important people have found online worship to be.

"The number of devices registered for our services each week is more than the number of people we tended to get in church prior to Covid. What is even more exciting is that, for each device, there may be more than one person taking part, meaning that we are attracting a wider, more diverse audience from across the town and much further afield. It's been lovely to have different generations of the same family worshipping together from different parts of Britain and beyond."



St Peter and St Paul, Great Missenden

**The Rev. Canon Rosie Harper
Bishop of Buckingham's
Chaplain**

Cost:

Approximately £5,000 for three fixed cameras and all associated cabling, hardware, software and internet connectivity

St Peter and St Paul Great Missenden felt they were in a pretty good place digitally at the beginning of 2020; they'd upgraded their website to ensure it was easily accessible to all and they'd also dipped their toes into the world of social media, setting up Facebook and twitter accounts but as the Rev. Canon Rosie Harper says,

"This was pre-Covid and with a relatively ageing church population, there just wasn't the interest or need for more digital ways to communicate."

However, all that changed when the first national lockdown was introduced. Very quickly Rosie and her team realised that the local community were desperately seeking ways to connect with one and other and hold onto 'normality' through their worship.

As places of worship initially remained closed, Rosie began recording weekly services from her home, posting them onto Facebook once edited. However,

she and her curate quickly realised that live streaming would ensure a more personal connection with the congregation. Unfortunately, due to the location of St Peter and St Paul there was limited internet connectivity, and the team knew they needed to find a solution, and fast.

One of the congregation was able to help modernise their digital offering by installing and configuring an equipment solution that would enable the church to live stream services on social media. St Peter and St Paul's would use three fixed cameras with video switching capabilities and all associated cabling, hardware, software and internet connectivity in order to stream to their chosen platform (Facebook).

Whilst most homes can connect to the internet quite easily, for an historic church building it is a little trickier! Rosie says that the Deaconry and Diocese were hugely helpful and quick to approve the necessary hardware installation onto the church tower, (Rosie and her team had planned the installation carefully so as not to damage any of the masonry of the church). And so the Archdeacon asked Rosie to set to work as quickly as possible.

Fast forward nearly a year and the church offers two services on a Sunday; one at 8am which typically attracts about 60 people and one at

10am which sees, on average, 200 participants. This is significantly more than in-person services held at the same time prior to lockdown. Groups such as the junior church have also shifted online with live lessons and the team can engage with local schools more easily.

While Rosie is hopeful that once COVID-19 has been brought under control, churches will be able to resume in-person services, she believes the benefits of modernising their digital offering will be beneficial for years to come; the church will be able to minister to those that are housebound and their new connectivity will enable them to hold film nights and study groups. As well as these positive outcomes, another benefit of the digital offering has been that, while people's physical geographic boundaries may have shrunk, the world of online worship has opened up a network of international friends and supporters, with services being watched by people as far away as America.

Overall, Rosie feels that moving online has reaped many positive rewards with people feeling a sense of connection and community despite the strange times. As one person commented on Facebook, **"Thank you all for a lovely service. It was so good to be a part of it. Picture and sound were perfect!"**



All Saints High Wycombe

Derek Lancaster
Licensed Lay Minister

Cost:

Approximately £4,000 for cameras, computer and data video streamer

Prior to the pandemic, All Saints Church in High Wycombe had begun to upgrade their digital toolkit, replacing the sound system and adding a camera and video streamer with a view to starting to offer a streaming option for worship. LLM Derek Lancaster knew, as a former Sound Engineer, that if they were to live stream services, the quality of the sound would be key in engaging the congregation. Although these were small steps towards going digital, they really came into their own when the first lockdown was introduced, with Derek and his vicar offering a daily prayer and Sunday service on Facebook live. Taking up

the digital mantle to keep All Saints' live services via zoom and Facebook flourishing, Derek began researching and buying new kit with a focus on quality camera and IT hardware.

Next on their digital wish list is to upgrade their connectivity by installing permanent ethernet or SDI (serial digital interface) cables, helping them to reach worshippers, wherever they may be and extending the range of services on offer to help support the local community. This could include zoom coffee mornings and prayer and bible study groups, following the example of the church's youth team who have successfully transitioned their toddler group to an online platform.

Derek says,

"For a church that barely thought about digital optimisation a year ago, I'm really proud of how far we have come. Last Sunday, we were

joined by 70 adults and 12 children on zoom and had 11 participants on Facebook live, which is not far off the number of people we used to get at in person services (on average 110 people).

"We've been really careful to make sure that those members of the congregation who feel a little wary of online streaming can still access what they need; we record our weekly sermons as podcasts, our Zoom host ensures they call participants beforehand to explain how to take part on Zoom, and we also post text versions of the news sheet and sermon to those who want them.

"This multi-mode approach has really worked for us and I hope will pave the way for engaging more of our community as we come out the other side of the pandemic"