

# Parish Support

## The challenges and opportunities of lockdown

*Much of church work in our parishes is done at ground level, and is often informed by wider research. With the growth of webinars, it is becoming easier to attend meetings.*

The Salisbury Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship recently hosted a video chat with the Ven Bob Jackson, who has extensively researched, written and consulted on the subject of church growth.

The Revd Jono Tregale says:

"It was great to gather online last week to consider some of the challenges and opportunities that lockdown has presented to the church, and in particular to hear from the Ven Bob Jackson about his latest research.

"Much of his material can be found in expanded form in his publications '[Everyone Welcome Online](#)' and '[Everyone Welcome to the Future](#)' which are freely available online."

Bob has also sent through the latest statistical analysis he has, following further church surveys conducted.

Sampled from:

11 groups, 10 in England plus one C in W deanery from St Asaph Diocese.  
198 churches, 107 benefices.

Headlines:

- 85% of benefices were offering online church services
- Including those from the 15% of churches not online, about 30% of previous churchgoers did not move online with their church. That is a lot of people to lose, but the % varies a lot from church to church – anywhere from 0% to 80% of members were not switching online.
- Average weekly attendance at the 198 churches before lockdown was 11,050. Using a method of translating devices and views metrics into people gives an estimated 16,800 accessing online church after lockdown – a 52% increase.
- The average church starting with 100 attendances lost 30 and gained 82. Much of that net growth was caused by people coming more frequently and by people attending more than one church, but a good half is probably new or returned churchgoers. This is the first large-scale increase in churchgoing for many decades.
- Experience varies widely between churches – only 53% of benefices have actually seen an increase in numbers, but 25% have more than doubled. Older congregations and those in deprived areas seem to have seen less growth than younger ones in affluent areas.
- Churches only using Zoom - a closed, invitation-only, keep-strangers-out platform - have seen a 25% reduction in attendance. Those using either Facebook or YouTube have averaged a 50% increase, but multi-platform churches have seen a 90% increase. Multi-platform is the way to go.
- Most of the growth happened almost immediately at the start of lockdown. 35% of churches said their attendance was continuing to increase week by week, 17% to decrease. So growth was probably still happening through the spring and early summer. While the lockdown eased and people went on holidays, anecdotal evidence suggests

numbers have started to fall. At the time of surveying, it was too early to know what happened in September as churches started to open up buildings again.

- Trends in small churches are at least as good as in large ones. People value local, authentic, a church with which they have a link or emotional attachment. For Anglicans the biggest % increases have been in the daily office, weekday morning prayer and compline.