



Leading your Church
into Growth

Seven Steps for a Covid Christmas (and Advent)

Over the past few months thousands of people have been plugging into online services. In addition churches have been visiting, delivering to and helping care for lots of people in our local communities.

Over the coming days dioceses and other organisations will put out lots of creative ideas about what can be done around Advent and Christmas when there are restrictions caused by Covid-19. What can be done will depend on each individual church and parish: where it is, what resources there are, and how much time they have. What might be possible in a medieval church building that is at the end of a country lane and part of an eight parish benefice will be very different from what is possible in a church building with lots of sound equipment, Wi-Fi, and audio visual gadgetry that is in the middle of a student area in a bustling city – and that is just fine: different is good.

With all these ideas flying around it is too easy to be tempted to get a little manic over what our churches *can* do, what our churches *should* do, and what our churches *will* do. There are lots of *good* ideas, but not all of them will be the *right* idea for where we are.

In the midst of that, at Leading your Church into Growth, we think we might need reminding *why* we would do these things.

When we remember that it is so we can hold out a message of hope to the world, it will become easier to know which of all those good ideas is the right one. Furthermore, good, creative, and even right ideas will work best when they are part of a bigger picture: a picture of growth, prayer, invitation, evangelism, worship, and planning for 2021.

We hope these seven simple steps – that are not about creative ideas – might help with that.

Let us share some hope in Advent and Christmas 2020. Don't do too much, but do do something.



Consider who you will invite and how you will invite them.

Normally at Christmas we have loads of people turn up to church buildings for packed services. They know they will all squeeze in for carols or Christingles: meaning the church has a real opportunity to share the hope of Jesus Christ with parishioners who may only come once a year.

This year 'squeezing in' is not an option this year. That means that people will need careful invitation, in good time, knowing what is happening, when, and where (online or in the building). They will also need to know if and how they can book their place. Printed material delivered to homes, social media, digital and printed invites for congregants to pass on to others will all be very important – it is never too early to sort these out!



Have a good online guest service for Christmas.

One lesson the church has learned in lockdown is that a large proportion of people find it easier to come to a service online than they do in person. An online service will also mean people can sing along to their favourite carols (thankfully there is a 'mute all' button!)

Be sure to have a good online service, and, as per the above step, get word out about it in good time.



Look ahead to what's next

Christmas is usually a fairly exhausting time for lay and ordained, paid or volunteers: there is every indication that this year could be busier as we negotiate Covid regulations. Nonetheless, it is worth, as part of your planning, to consider the question of what will happen next and

how you will best communicate that with guests attending at Christmas. Important questions will be: How can you stay in touch with those visiting services at Advent and Christmas? What will you invite them to next? Perhaps plan a Start Course or other 'seeker's course' for the season of Epiphany. Such courses work well online.



Use available resources, save time, and then do the personal touch.

There are resources available that will help you create a culture of invitation and share the Good News this Christmas and Advent: do use them. The 'A Church Near You' Resource Hub (<https://bit.ly/31q10UH>) has hymns available, and carols coming soon.

The Church of England is running a campaign with lots of resources called 'Comfort and Joy' (<https://bit.ly/2T8PBE2>), there are other websites and resources available too. Another way to save time will be to repeat the same service: this will allow you to invite more people to come along. Time saved by adapting and using available resources will give you more time to plan what's next, and more time for the personal touch in your parish. Time saved may also mean something very important: go easy on yourself – don't try and do what you can't, don't compare yourself with others.



Develop engaging worship

Despite the season, and despite a national pandemic or otherwise some factors that can help a church grow are always relevant. 'Curating' inspirational, considered, creative and welcoming worship that is relevant to the people of your parish is a key aspect of church growth. Remember it is not about a particular style or

churchmanship; nor is it about trying to do what the parish down the road is doing, it is about people, new and old, feeling comfortable and welcomed to meet with God and to meet with, and build up, one another.



Practice fruitful evangelism

Over Advent and Christmas there will be a lot going on in the life of our churches – some of it in the buildings, some of it online. This year will be a year where the church uses the most diverse methods of connecting with people – circumstances has made that necessary. It

will also be a year where lots of people are hungry for hope. As you seek to practice fruitful evangelism, there are two key aspects to recall. The first is to encourage your people, led by your example, to invite others to draw close and worship the Messiah as the shepherds did. The second is, in your services, be sure to gently and pastorally give people an opportunity to respond to the message of hope you share.



Pray for Growth

Again, it doesn't matter what the season, or what is happening in the world, some aspects of church growth are always relevant. *How* you currently pray for growth may have to change, but it is something we ought to continue to do as individuals, as ministry and leadership teams, and as a church. 'Then Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is huge. But there are only a few workers. So ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers out into his harvest field."'

Finally

Remember, again, don't do too much. Don't do what someone else is doing. Just do what you can do...

We do all this not because evangelism is part of our job description, something that we ought to do, another thing that we are supposed to do. We share the Good News, or attempt to, because we love God and His church and because we want to serve our and His people.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9:36