

Digital worship is integral to mission



Diocesan webmaster and worship leader **Matt Lockwood** shares tips on doing hybrid worship

LAST year, as the global lockdown took effect, Brooke Ligertwood, a worship leader in Australia, was asked, “What will worship look like now?” Her answer: “Worship looks today exactly like it did yesterday, a year ago, five years ago and 20 years ago.” Worship doesn’t change, just the means and methods we employ.

Worship is more than just singing. Edith Humphrey in her book *Grand Entrance* (BrazosPress, 2011) describes worship as being “an entry into an action, into a company, into a reality that is ongoing and bigger than we are.” Worship connects us to *missio dei*, to act for peace, justice and service, and to make disciples.

This last year has shaken our churches’ reliance on the styles, forms and methods we’ve become over-comfortable with and over-attached to, and forced us to consider and debate what worship is – especially corporate worship – and how it can be expressed, particularly using a digital platform.

The incredible innovation and authenticity in using digital to lead worship in the last 16 months has positioned the Church at a crossroads, and it would be a shame to see any church fall back to pre-lockdown practices just because it’s more convenient, or

the challenge of a new approach is too much to take on.

The opportunity now to reach people who are looking to encounter a loving God – but would never come to one of our in-person events – should give us fresh enthusiasm to live out the Great Commission, so the real question is “How? How do we use digital as well as in-person to lead people in worship?”

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There’s no one-size-fits-all answer. What is vital is that we do not treat digital as an inferior expression. The people engaging digitally do so because they can’t, or more likely don’t want to, engage in-person, and they’ll disconnect very quickly if they feel like an afterthought.

Have someone be a host for your digital provision to introduce and sometimes explain what’s happening, and invite (and monitor) social discussion. This could happen on the live stream while other things are happening in the in-person service. Signpost digital visitors to other digital content, rather than in-person events. When you start to lead

worship, as well as encouraging those with you in-person, speak a thought directly to the camera for those watching live – remember they’ll have a million other distractions around them.

Consider creating some worship content just for your Facebook page, that people can engage with whenever they want – a selection of songs, scriptures and prayers that a jogger can perhaps listen to on their morning run. But in all you do be authentic, be real.

I think God’s word to Israel through the prophet Isaiah gives us some hope and perspective as we take on the challenge of leading worship on a multiplicity of platforms: “You’ll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You’ll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again.” (Isaiah 58:12). We’re taking what we’ve learnt and we’re making something new, building community and seeing life come forth.

The national Church of England has set up a page on their website packed with resources, links and articles for running hybrid services. You can access it via www.portsmouth.anglican.org/digitalworship.