

## Transitioning from Lockdown: Some Models

*Compiled by the Training and Development Officers of*

*Eastern, East Midlands, South Western and West Midlands Synods and  
National Synod of Wales*

The Training and Development or equivalent officers have compiled summaries of eight common models of worship currently being used by our churches as lockdown gradually lifts. We have not focused on pastoral care or other features of church life; we are not concerned here with risk assessments or lettings.

These models are derived from actual, reported experience and vary according to the skills, technology, size and enthusiasm of the churches and pastorates concerned. We did not set out to compile a comprehensive picture of what URC churches are doing, or to favour or prescribe any one model; in several cases they use similar elements in a different balance. Nor have we sought here to explain in detail the technology being used: please contact your TDO who can help or signpost you to the particular churches concerned.

*“to be honest it [has been] strange, but strangely lovely... in reality it never was a building, or a minister that made these things Holy.... It was always, in our tradition, the presence of Christ, among a people who gather to worship him. I’ve felt that presence”*

### **The Eight Models**

A: A strong ‘mixed economy’

B: Telephone Conferencing

C: Phased return to ‘normal’

D: Offline

E: Doing Both

F: Ongoing Adaptation

G: No Rush to Normal

H: National / Local Blend

## Model A – a strong “mixed economy”

### During Lockdown

- **Zoom services** (“a different kind of wonderful”) – participants up to age 96, including some by phone
  - Zoom remains open for “coffee time” after the Sunday service
  - Orders of service are supplied to those not reached by technological means
- **Evening prayer** on WhatsApp (every evening; includes shared hymn; participants invited to light a candle/torch)
- **Fellowship / prayer chain** on WhatsApp
- **Virtual Coffee mornings** formerly 5<sup>th</sup> Saturdays only, now are held each Saturday in lockdown, with “attenders” putting money in a jar at home (leading to £1000 for Rainbows Hospice)
- **Wednesday Quiz** on Zoom
- **Artwork** by Messy Church/Pilots/Cogs (Children of God on a Sunday) displayed online and in glass frontage
- **Annual Holiday Club** online using YouTube and other channels during the scheduled week

### As Lockdown lifts

- Phased return to gathered Sunday services
- **Evening prayer** on WhatsApp to continue
  - it is anticipated that fewer will now join in live at 7pm: some will “catch up” later
- **Virtual coffee mornings** to continue every Saturday (at least until Christmas)
- **Online sharing** on Facebook, WhatsApp and the church website is set to continue

*The church continues to work on creative ways of engaging those without access to technology so that they also have access to worship and fellowship*

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## Model B – Telephone Conferencing

### During Lockdown

- **Worship:** using telephone conferencing for Sunday worship. (In addition, teleroom gatherings daily during Holy Week led to Tuesday & Thursday meetings for prayer and themed conversation then later, Bible study and exploration of Celtic spirituality.)
  - Allows up to 50 phone lines (a limit not yet reached) to engage in live worship, with multiple people using each line in many cases
  - Users need no IT beyond a telephone line, so both fully inclusive and interactive: worshippers can hear one another sing and pray
  - A variety of people can take part in leading worship, as in church, and both recorded and live music can be incorporated
  - Only one or two people need master the technicalities of the conferencing platform (holiday cover is also advised); everyone else simply dials in (at local or 'bundle' rates)
  - Offers enhanced safeguarding and privacy safeguards over video conferencing
  - Has enabled participation not only by older members (including some unable to attend physically on Sundays) but also by people in every decade of life including younger families, students
- Services sheets are sent (mainly by email in advance); recordings are shared online and on Facebook by uploading the recorded service to Soundcloud

### As Lockdown lifts

- Continuation of recorded service and prayer as part of a mixed delivery/blended model, with telephone conferencing continuing to play an important role for the foreseeable future.
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## **Model C: Phased return to 'normal'**

### **Sunday service during Lockdown**

- Minister and readers pre-recorded (at home), inserted into film with a song, posted on YouTube, link sent to all members and friends prior to Sunday morning
  - printed sermon delivered to those not online

### **Sunday service since July 4**

#### **3-pronged Worship:**

- Service being pre-recorded in advance, as lockdown
- Live church service in building with congregation: same sermon / readings / prayers used as pre-recorded
- Printed sermon delivered as above

### **Sunday service since August 2 (further easing of restriction)**

- Live-streaming of service to YouTube, using single camera / tripod to capture pulpit, lectern and screen projection (+ laptop / sound system)

*The Minister sends out a weekly email with guidance for the week's service; as they are adapting their model almost weekly this is helpful for the congregation.*

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## **Model D: Offline - post and telephone**

*58% of this pastorate has no access to a device (this figure doesn't include those with a device but without the internet)*

### **During Lockdown:**

A prepared service provided to all, and available via:

- post
- an email bulletin from the church website
- free telephone conference system (including telephone communion service)
  - participants dial in

### **Further developments:**

- Communion Service was uploaded as a podcast on week 4 of lockdown
  - telephone worship has been recorded and the audio released as a 'vlog' on the church's YouTube channel to give access to those working or otherwise unavailable
  - dialling-in may be continued as the church begins to reopen
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## **Model E: Doing Both**

### **During Lockdown**

Sunday worship:

- Morning: prepared notes / reflections posted and emailed
- Evening: recorded service (often communion) posted to YouTube

Fellowship:

- Weekly mail/emailing of prayer notes and requests encouraging to use regular Tuesday morning time
- Dementia-friendly singing sessions: recorded and posted on YouTube weekly

### **As Lockdown Lifts:**

*“doing both is worth it for the benefit of enabling and leading the whole church in worship of our God”*

- Pre-recorded service available online
  - Live service in church (once open)
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## Model F: Adapting and Developing

### Before official Lockdown

- recording of sermon (on phone), posted to YouTube and Facebook

### During Lockdown

- Zoom meetings
- then pre-recorded service uploaded to YouTube
- then running the same service in Zoom, using a mixture of live preaching/ readings/ prayers and YouTube clips
  - Break-out rooms for junior church and youth group, and at the end of services for fellowship

### As Lockdown lifts

- minister in the church building, on Zoom with those still at home
  - then minister and others in the church building, on Zoom with those still at home
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## Model G: No Rush to 'Normal'

### During Lockdown

- Worship - two Sunday Services
  - Morning: free telephone conferencing system; increase in "attendance" from an average of 45 to 90+; reaching the 'housebound'
  - Evening service on Zoom; increase in "attendance" from an average of 6 to 20

### As Lockdown lifts

- Worship
    - Desire to retain both morning teleconferencing and evening Zoom services
    - No desire for meeting in person for worship which excludes hymn singing and fellowship, but there is a real desire to meet up again
    - Currently exploring ways in which this might be achieved outdoors
  - Outreach
    - churches have seen new mission opportunities
    - concern that some existing outreach groups 'may never meet again'
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## Model H: National / Local Blend

### During Lockdown

- Worship - Phase 1
  - circulation of URC's Daily Devotions Sunday Service

Encouragement to subscribe, weekly email reminders for those who can't or won't subscribe, duplication of CDs and booklets which are then posted to those not online

- Worship - Phase 2
  - Fortnightly online worship produced collaboratively:
    - Pre-recorded service by several worship leaders and edited into video
    - shared during a Zoom gathering midweek
    - video posted on Facebook and Youtube for "catch up"
    - audio copy, sent with Daily Devotions as above

### As Lockdown lifts

- Mixed mode of worship delivery
  - face to face
  - online

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## Further Reflections and Suggestions:

Most churches are *'trying to resist a return to the old normal'* – this means different things to different churches, but was a very common theme.

In most churches there is a mixture of people involved: the minister has often taken the lead, but Lay Preachers, Elders and other local leaders have had significant input and engagement. Much online worship has used several people's gifts.

While there has been a huge learning curve in skills, and lots of enthusiasm and excitement around for some of the changes, there is also an acknowledgment that for many people church life is simply not the same and they feel the loss acutely.

Many churches made reference to the **Emerging into the New Normal** and the **New reality, Same Mission** booklets (available on the URC website <https://urc.org.uk/information-guides.html>)

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Some suggestions for **hymns** in the church building while restrictions are in place:

1. Words projected with piano and/or organ accompaniment; humming of tune; silent mouthing of words
2. Speaking the words 'as a poem' (unaccompanied)
3. Watching YouTube video on screen while seated

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Some suggestions about **phone conferencing** (received from one church using <https://www.freeconference.com/> as its platform):

"The host needs to sign up and you are given your passcode etc. All very simple. There are no fees for the basic plan (you can upgrade). Calls for participants are charged at standard rate so they need to be on call plans (eg free evenings or at weekends) or within inclusive minutes on a mobile. Then there is no additional charge, provided you keep under 60 mins for landlines.

I put this instruction on top of each week's prayer sheet:

First, get your Bible or access an online version. If you wish to join in with our telephone worship, please call **0333 XXX XXXX**, then enter the access code, **xxx xxxx** followed by **#** (not **£** as the lady says!). You will be asked to say your name and enter **#** and, in a moment or two you will be connected. Please dial in before 11am.

The host can either dial in or use the website on a laptop. I use a laptop as you can control muting etc. Any participant can sign up to the scheme and also use their laptop rather than their phone, if they prefer, but there are other, better apps to use if you want to use computers generally."

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We are grateful to the following churches, pastorates and individuals for their contributions:

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**"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."**

**Matthew 18:20**