

Easing the lockdown – fifth review, Wednesday 30 September

Reflections on (approaching) three months of ‘hybrid’ / Stage Two Sundays

“In Stage Two, the 10.45am service will be broadcast live online from inside one of the churches. The continuing use of pre-recorded inserts will ensure that those who are choosing (or required) not to attend will still have the opportunity to take part. The pre-recorded inserts will be shown on a screen in church, as well as being included in the live online broadcast, so that everyone can continue to feel fully involved in the worship life of the four parishes.”

Statistics

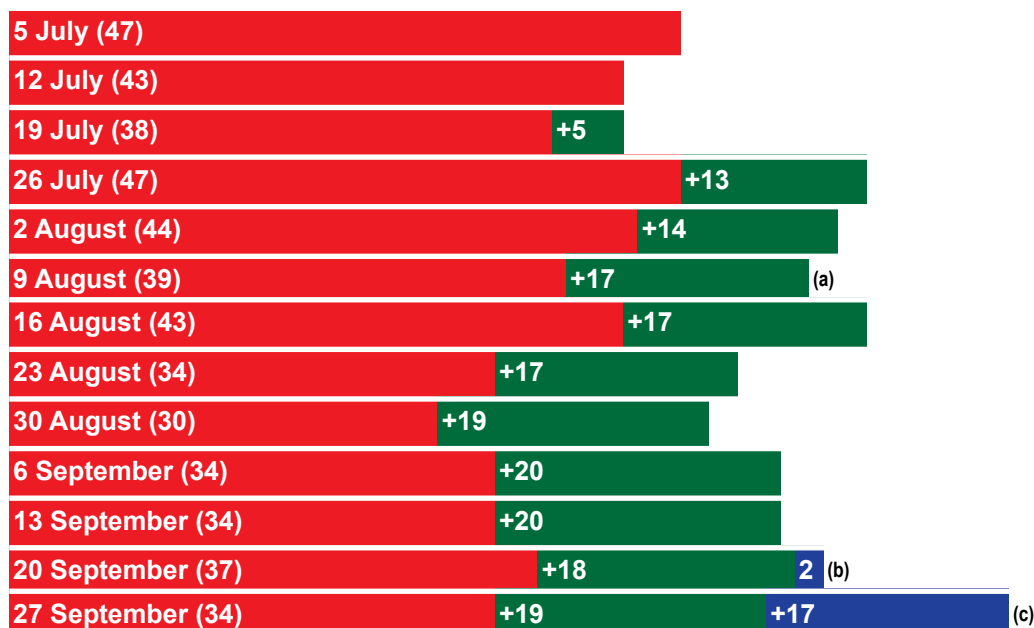
These are the attendance figures for the last three months.

The red figure is *households* watching live on YouTube (and more may watch later).

The green figure is *individuals* attending in person in Hornby.

The blue figure is individuals attending at another site

(in these examples Llandecwyn and Whittington)



(a) CofE attendance at joint service with Saint Mary's

(b) Live link to Llandecwyn North Wales

(c) Live link between Hornby and Whittington for the Whittington Patronal Festival

General observations

The ‘hybrid’ services continue to be joyful occasions for those who gather in church, and continue to attract positive feedback from people participating online.

With an expected further six months of lockdown measures announced last week, this now-established pattern of Sunday worship, with attendance online and in person, may be the ‘new normal’ for some time.

A good attendance in Whittington for the Whittington Patronal Festival boosted total attendance significantly – although with 34 *households* watching online, it is likely that online attendance still slightly exceeded attendance in person.

Reflections

On Sunday 27 September, we marked Whittington's Patronal Festival with the first Sunday service north of the river since lockdown. This service was linked by Zoom to a simultaneous service in Hornby. There were congregations in both churches as well as online, all sharing in the one service. Whilst the technology mostly worked, some of the audio quality was poor, and Hornby could not hear the pre-recorded inserts. For myself, I suspect that the effort of putting it all together every week (and sorting out the remaining technical issues) is not really justified (feel free to argue otherwise); but we did learn that there may be a demand for the resumption of some Sunday services north of the river. The puzzle now is how to accommodate that, given that setting up the 'hybrid' online/offline 10.45am service effectively takes up the whole of Sunday morning.

Options for resuming Sunday services north of the river:

1. Have the hybrid service as now, from Hornby, and occasionally have another service, also on Sunday morning, by having someone other than the vicar run one of the two services (when someone is available to do so, which at present may only be fairly occasionally). If both services were at 10.45am, the 10.45am online congregation could join the service north of the river on some occasions (instead of being 'always in Hornby'), with Hornby (on those occasions) hosting the non-hybrid service.
2. Pay to install hybrid-service equipment permanently in Hornby (perhaps about £2,500) so that it does not need setting up every week. This may make a 9am service possible elsewhere every week if there is the demand (9.30am would still be too much of a rush and a risk).
3. Have regular Sunday afternoon or weekday services north of the river.

We can consider these options (and any others) at the four Annual Parochial Church Meetings on Sunday 25 October (less than four weeks away).

Midweek services

The Wednesday morning 10am service in Hornby continues to have a larger average attendance than before lockdown, although in September this has dipped into single figures. It is clearly valued, including by some who prefer to have a shorter service than Sunday's because of the inconvenience of having to wear a face covering.

Midweek *online* attendance has declined steeply since the Wednesday service resumed in church, and this week hit zero. In the never-ending process of juggling priorities, I am ending the online midweek service in order to have more time to invest in supporting the Sunday congregations, including the substantial online Sunday congregation.

Michael Hampson, 30 September 2020