



ANGLICAN FUTURES

THINKING TOGETHER

PHYGITAL FUTURES

1. Learning from the Experts—What do we mean by Phygital?
2. Digital Replication and Digital Enhancement
3. What are the Principles of Meeting Together
4. Why Continue with a Physical and a Digital Service ?
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6. New Realities: Enhancing the Physical Meeting
7. New Realities: Theological Thinking Required

Gafcon UK provides hope and a home to all who affirm the 2008 Jerusalem Declaration.

Anglican Futures is one way in which we equip faithful Anglicans by encouraging us all to:

- Think Ahead (in the light of today's evidence)
- Think Afresh (in the light of eternal truth)

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Phygital Futures

1. Learning from the Experts—What is Phygital?

Phygital is a term borrowed from marketing. It refers to the concept of blending the physical and digital world to create unique, differentiated and enriched customer experiences. Mobile apps instead of loyalty cards; click and collect; digital experts in store; instant checkout or touchscreen ordering points. These are all examples of the way retail stores are blending our physical and digital experience.

But it's not just about the way we buy things. Education providers are also looking at how the experience of students can be enhanced by combining the benefits of the physical and digital worlds; students are able to arrive at school and virtually dissect a heart in the biology lab, go on a virtual field-trip to Yosemite National Park after lunch and raise their heart rate playing Wii tennis, even if it is pouring outside.

We use smartphones and smartwatches to measure the number of steps we walk or the quality of our sleep. Most of us now rely on our satnav or Google Maps rather than grabbing a tattered copy of the A-Z from our glove-box. We have apps that allow us to order a drink in the pub, transfer money online, show our boarding pass at check-in and order a taxi when we arrive in a foreign city. In many ways we are phygital natives.

The potential for digital enhancement of the physical world keeps expanding: augmented reality (AR) glasses which act as a 'screen' in front of the viewers eyes, holograms that can interact with real people, earbuds that offer instant translation, crowds watching e-sports—these are all available today.



By 2025, we can expect five-sense internet experience and, by 2030, it is possible that our digital devices will be able to read our minds. In 'Tomorrow's World' we won't even have to lift a finger to change channel or put the kettle on.

But what has that got to do with the church?



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Phyigital Futures

2. Digital Replication and Digital Enhancement

The truth is that, before Covid-19, most churches were already investigating the phyigital world. We used our website to welcome newcomers before they arrived on a Sunday; clergy gathered in online chatrooms to share ideas and discuss topics of interest; small groups gathered in sitting rooms to listen to online sermons or video courses.

As Covid-19 took us online - we worked hard to replicate a digital version of our physical environment. We've seen sets built in sitting rooms; kitchen tables are now home to pre- and post-production meetings; eighty year olds are zooming each other for a virtual coffee and people we would never have met, or could never have met, are dropping in to our services.

One of the surprising aspects of the Anglican Futures: Lockdown Learning¹ event was the enthusiasm many had for the digital experience. It was so encouraging to hear stories of prayer meetings which have blossomed; business meetings that seem less onerous; of those previously excluded from Sunday gatherings through illness or other circumstance being drawn in; of the evangelistic benefits of taking church into the home.

As we look further into the future we see opportunities for digital enhancement of our physical meetings; real-time translation; a 'virtual' preacher, band or mission partner visiting by hologram; freedom from service sheets or projection screens.

And yet, we are physical people. We long for physical experience. Despite the rise of the e-book, the hardback book has not become extinct; online shopping may be easier than ever, but when lockdown was lifted there were five-mile queues outside Ikea.

Our church families long to gather again in person. As Paul said to the Thessalonians, *"But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face"*. The grief is real and the joy will be great.

But, how do we decide what to keep and what to lose? How do we decide when to return to our buildings? How do we avoid people choosing to do church in their PJs forever?

Anglican Futures is about becoming more pro-active; looking ahead to give us time to make good decisions based on good principles rather than just reacting to the latest crisis.

So, as we discussed the question of our how phyigital our church would be in the future we considered the question from two perspectives.

- The 2-Year Horizon - how might we continue to digitally replicate physical meetings?
- The 5-Year Horizon - how might we digitally enhance the physical meeting?



Phygital Futures

3. What are the Principles of Meeting Together

Why do we meet together?

When the writer to the Hebrews exhorted his readers to “*not give up meeting with one another,*” it was so they could ‘*encourage one another*’ and ‘*spur one another on toward love and good deeds,*’ (Hebrews 10:24-25). When the early church met together in the temple courts and in one another's homes, it was so they could eat together, learn together and pray together (Acts 2:42-46). As the church grew things became more complex; new congregations sprang up; the apostles appointed deacons to ensure that there was no discrimination in the distribution of food; financial collections were organised and distributed; and the day to day administration of church life developed.

So, it could be said that although we meet together for many reasons, these three stand out:

We want to proclaim Christ - through our teaching and our worship.

We want to love one another - as we enjoy fellowship and serve one another in practical ways.

We want good order - so we need to plan, prepare and ensure good discipline.

How should we meet together?

Before lockdown, our default option was to meet physically - in person.

During lockdown we have learned that meeting online is possible, if not always ideal. We have continued to proclaim Christ and if the surveys² are to be believed many more people have attended a religious service and anecdotally many of them have heard the gospel. Churches have found imaginative ways to love and serve one another and the day to day administration of the church has continued.

Now that lockdown is being eased, we face some difficult questions, as we consider the return to our physical buildings:

We are all familiar with the need for a **Risk Assessment** - We are busy calculating the size of our buildings, the pinchpoints, the number of entrances and the amount of hand sanitiser we need. A list of helpful guidance can be found at the end of this document.

But alongside the risk assessments, many churches are carrying out surveys to discover the level of **risk acceptance** amongst their regular church family, so they can gauge what the take up might be for physical meetings. Churches with a high number of shielding members, or where people are reliant on public transport to get to church, or churches with lots of young children are reporting a lower level of risk acceptance and may need to remain digital for longer

Even the Church of England suggests we should consider going ‘*phygital*’ (with both physical and digital ways of accessing services) for a transition period³ but perhaps we should be doing more than that? We need to keep in mind the longer term vision - the church we want to see in two or five years time.



Phyigital Futures: Two Year Horizon

4. Why Continue with a Physical and a Digital Service ?

As the church leaders involved with Anglican Futures have reflected on the impact of lockdown most think they will be more engaged with the online/digital world in the future. Which raises some new questions:

Will you keep live-streaming services? Will you offer on-line Home Groups?

Perhaps we should begin by thinking about who has been helped by being able to access church at home? Five examples:

Mavis is 94. Her eyesight is failing, walking is difficult, and lunch in her care home is served at noon. She has been a member of St John's for forty years. Prior to lockdown she had not been able to attend the morning service for several months. Wonderfully, as lockdown began, her church provided her with an i-Pad and her carers help her join the Zoom service each Sunday. What a joy to see and hear her church family again; to see the way the children are growing. Others in her care home have asked about the singing and she has suggested they join in.

Peter and Jane are 37, their children are 9, 6 and 3. It is nearly ten years since they have been able to attend House Group together. Admittedly, one of them may have to run upstairs at some point, but the benefit of studying together, praying together and developing relationships together has been very real and they know they'll miss the fellowship when things return to normal.

Martin is 27. He is an engineer who works on short term contracts all over Europe. He was locked down in Madrid. For the past three years he has struggled to have any regular Christian fellowship. He keeps in touch with folk at his home church in London. During lockdown he has been able to watch their livestreamed service on YouTube and then joined others for a virtual coffee time after the service. It feels to him like streams of living water in a desert.

Richard is 43. He lives alone and suffers from regular episodes of depression. The church family have always been kind - checking on him when he can't make it to church or House Group, and supporting him spiritually and practically. In lockdown they have continued to care for him. It hasn't been easy, lockdown has coincided with a particularly dark time for him. Getting to church would have been a step too far - even joining the Zoom call has been an effort - but he has persevered (admittedly without video to avoid people knowing he is still in his pyjamas). Richard would describe it as a lifeline and has expressed concern that it might stop.

Nisha is 29. She would describe herself as a Muslim, though her family are not very devout. She takes her son, Aamir, to the mothers and toddlers group at the parish church. Last week, she was online and came across a Facebook post from the church advertising their Sunday service. She only watched a few minutes of it but she was intrigued. Perhaps she'll watch a bit more when no one is in the house?

Some have asked the question, "Why didn't we do it before?"

But how do we take advantage of the connectivity that the digital world offers without becoming snowed under by cameras, lights and post production nightmares?

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Phyigital Futures: Two Year Horizon

5. How to Get the Most from Physical and Digital Meetings

Choose when to use digital and when not to

Not all church meetings benefit from being digital. We have all found how awkward it can be to eat with others; how exhausting it can be to keep momentum going in informal settings; how easy it is for some people to dominate a conversation; how quickly we become zoomed out.

But some meetings thrive, for example an early morning prayer meeting which does not add to commuting times or a short business meeting which avoids the need to travel or set up.

Embrace the Phyigital Nature of Mixed meetings

Physicalise the Digital - One church has decided to refer to their online live stream as “The Gallery,” in order to make people feel as if they are part of what is happening in the building - even if they are physically distant. Another has spoken of ‘virtual minibus trips’ to visit online conferences or special events at other churches - to help ground the experience in normal life.

Consider two way interaction. Think about a regular interview slot to keep in touch with those who are accessing church online - eg “The View From The Sofa/ Gallery.” This could be recorded or ‘live ‘ but it will help keep relationships between those at home and those in the building.

Replicating a Digital Meeting is About Authentic Connection

Avoid a Performance Culture - try and find a way of filming the ‘main action’ in as simple a way as possible. A tripod and a smartphone uploading directly to Instagram or Facebook Live should be sufficient if the wifi or 4/5G reception is good. Whatever the technology - aim for excellence in relationships rather than excellence in production values.

Keep connected - Many of the ‘online congregation’ will one day join the ‘physical congregation’ - so building or maintaining relationships between the congregations is key for long term health. Many churches that pre-recorded their services during lockdown used a more interactive platform for ‘coffee’ after church. Finding a quiet-ish corner of the church building to set up a Zoom-style meeting for those in ‘The Gallery’ will allow those in the building to interact with those at home. Where appropriate - keep in mind the ideas for continuing community.⁴ If you have shared a birthday cake at physical church - arrange for someone to drop a piece off with those at home.

Think about how to draw-in the digital fringe. Those who are watching online because they want to remain ‘observers’ are not a new phenomenon. We’ve all known people to sneak in during the first hymn, sit at the back and sneak out during the last hymn. Respecting their desire for privacy is important - and finding a way to digitally smile at them is also important. For those who want to engage, setting up a newcomers coffee or evening - on an interactive platform (staying online to begin with) and introduce people to other members of the virtual and physical congregation.

Make (but don’t force) links with local congregations. During lockdown many churches have made contact with folk from faraway. Using church networks it may be possible to recommend a local church for them to get involved in - but recognise it may take a while to feel for them to feel confident enough to transfer—particularly if they are new to church in general.

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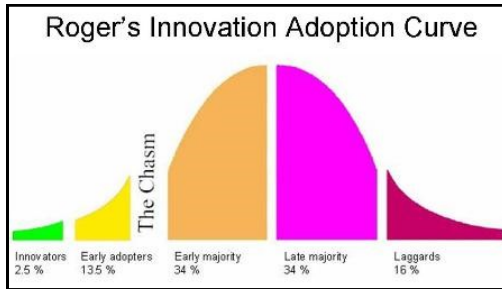


Phygital Futures: Five-Year Horizon

6. New Realities: Enhancing the Physical Meeting

Printed bibles... pipe organs... electric guitars...projectors...posting sermons online... Zoom...

The technology keeps developing - and with each innovation there are those keen to adopt it and those convinced that the devil is having a field day. This is not purely a Christian thing -



communications expert, Everett Rogers noted the phenomenon back in the 1960s. He was in the business of persuading people to take on new ideas - at Gafcon UK we are in the business of sifting new ideas from a biblical perspective. It's important that our conservative theology is not merely a reflection of a conservative mindset and important we don't just jump on board without thinking.

As we began to think about some of the ways digital technology was developing at our Phygital Future event, it didn't take the detective skills of Hercules Poirot to see where on the curve people sat.

Here are some of the responses to the vision of accessing the internet with our thoughts, or instant translation of the service, or a hologram of the Getty's band performing worship (or Tim Keller preaching or a mission partner asking for prayer), or a screenless/paperless church with everyone wearing AR glasses, or the perfect sermon based on biblically sound algorithms or any number of possible applications of the technology which will allow us to digitally enhance our church meetings.

Prophetic Early Adopters or Easily Distracted?	Grumpy Laggards or Theologically Astute?
<p><i>Bring it on! It's exciting. I'm a one-man band and it feels good to think there can be some ingredients brought in pre-recorded or even better - live.</i></p> <p><i>Amazing to think our rural church could have access to such amazing ministry.</i></p> <p><i>Small groups will be able to be so varied—people won't get bored.</i></p> <p><i>We'll be able to do Acts 2 without the miracle!</i></p> <p><i>People could do church without the social stress.</i></p> <p><i>The physical space would be so much more flexible.</i></p> <p><i>We are introducing AR tour guides funded by English Heritage.</i></p>	<p><i>Is there a danger of a consumerist approach? Horrid... but expect it to become normal.</i></p> <p><i>Perhaps people will enjoy meeting in a context which isn't overly technological?</i></p> <p><i>Ughh.. Sounds like Hell!</i></p> <p><i>Doesn't this cost us the reality and genuine-ness of Christian service?</i></p> <p><i>Will it make our hearts colder?</i></p> <p><i>How will it work—Like football without a crowd?</i></p> <p><i>This is a terrible idea.</i></p> <p><i>Thinking about it gives me a heart attack!</i></p>

"Be very careful of unintended consequences and be very careful about the digital ethics you put in place," Steve Prentice, VP of a technology research company.



Phyital Futures: Five Year Horizon

6. New Realities: Enhancing the Physical Meeting cont.

On further reflection, the breakout groups offered some interesting perspectives on the impact of digital enhancement on our hearts, the content of our services and the even the physical spaces in which we gather.

- ⇒ *It's relationships that matter - if relationships can be enhanced, all well and good but we shouldn't use technology for the gimmicks.*
- ⇒ *It could be the best of both worlds - small groups doing relationship - but with all the resources of a huge church at their disposal.*
- ⇒ *How do we avoid consumerism and individualism - if we can pick and choose too much? What will the impact be on the hearts of preachers and hearers if a 'celebrity preacher' could be virtually present in every church every Sunday?*
- ⇒ *Generally people are seeking a sense of community and local church - so the question is how do we use the technology to allow us to do what we do already, but better.*
- ⇒ *We need to remember to inspire to discipleship and relationship rather than excellence first - we desire faithful servants more than professionalism.*
- ⇒ *Will we be able to meet in smaller buildings - will the venue matter as much?*
- ⇒ *They've got to be tools which we use rather than things we are enslaved to.*
- ⇒ *What will be the impact on cross-cultural mission?*

As we looked to the five-year horizon and the opportunities for digital enhancement of the way we 'do' church, we were caused to pause. There was a deepening realisation of the depth of theological reflection that will be required of us if we are to make good choices about the technology that is likely to be available to us in the future.

Some of this study will be focused on the church - new technologies force us to think about the nature of the gathered church; our assumptions about what it looks like to be church; the nature of the Lord's Supper/ Holy Communion; the nature of preaching and teaching; the challenge to our holiness (or absence of challenge) if we become more individualistic; the changing nature of hospitality and the home.

However, we also recognised that whatever our evaluation of different aspects of the phyital world, the reality is we will experience it. As people living and working in the UK and Europe, we are likely to be forced to engage with these new technologies at work, at school and in our leisure time, even if we reject them on a Sunday. The change will happen - it is likely to be complicated and we need to be prepared to be disciples in the new world. There are many more questions that go the heart of what it means to be human, to be in relationship with one another and to love one another. Questions of identity and connectedness that will need to be wrestled with.

A few of the questions raised are outlined on the next page.



Phyigital Futures: Five Year Horizon

7. New Realities: Theological Thinking Required cont.

Here are just a few of the questions that were raised during the Anglican Futures events. Some are really just half-formed expressions of unease or disquiet.

- The church is the 'ecclesia' - the gathering
 - What is a biblical view of 'gathering'?
 - Does it have to be physical?
 - How many people count as a gathering?
 - When we gather - do we gather as the 'one holy, catholic apostolic church' or as a group of gathered individuals? Does it matter?
 - How does gathering 'virtually' in our homes impact on our understanding of the priesthood of all believers and the
- How does virtual reality change the way we relate to one another?
 - How will we avoid further compartmentalisation of our lives?
 - How can I be the 'real' me in a virtual world?
- Is technology a neutral tool - or is some technology unredeemable?
- What is a biblical view of the 'physical body'?
 - What is 'good' about the flesh?
 - Jesus revealed his 'personhood' as a man - and there is a strong theology of incarnation- yet the Holy Spirit is no less knowable as 'person' than Jesus? What are the implications for disembodied digital relationships?
 - To what extent do we need to share 'one cup' and 'one loaf' to show our 'one body'?
- What is biblical preaching?
 - Can a 'perfect sermon' exist? If so, should we deny our church access to something better than we can provide?
 - What is the role of the pastoral relationship?
 - What is the role of Holy Spirit?

You are bound to have more questions. If so, let us know what questions the phyigital future raises in your mind.

And if you are interested in beginning to explore some of these theological ideas, or know someone who is already working on them, please let us know - we need to be prepared and we'd love to think together at a Future Anglican event about these and other such questions.



Footnotes and Resources

Footnotes:

¹ Anglican Futures - Lockdown learning: https://mcusercontent.com/3a5abfd1065f1d313bd3a866d/files/fb1a90b4-9371-42d8-82b7-a6f45d96d175/Anglican_Futures_Lockdown_Learning.pdf

² Tearfund Survey ,April 2020 https://www.tearfund.org/media/press_releases/many_brits_look_to_faith_during_lockdown/

³ Church of England Guidance—Conducting Public Worship <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/COVID%2019%20advice%20on%20conducting%20public%20worship%20v1.1.pdf> (p2 version 1.1)

⁴ See page 7 of Lockdown Learning above

Risk Assessments:

Church of England Risk Assessment Template <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/20510>

Evangelical Alliance <https://www.eauk.org/coronavirus/policy-guidance-advice/emerging-from-lockdown-advice-and-faqs>

FIEC Video with a Health and Safety Inspector <https://fiec.org.uk/resources/how-to-assess-the-covid-19-risk-in-your-church-building>

FIEC Legal responsibilities <https://fiec.org.uk/resources/a-note-on-health-and-safety-legal-duties-for-churches>



ANGLICAN
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THINKING TOGETHER

YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S WORK: BEYOND BABYSITTING

Let's think together about how the disruption caused by Covid-19 might be used to build more effective ministry among our youth and children.

We'd Love You to Join the Discussion

Wednesday 8th July 10:30am

Wednesday 8th July 7.45pm

Friday 10th July 10.30am

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/gafcon-uk-18387367857>

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