

Live-Streaming Services Q&A – Revd Matt Williams

I hope the following Q&A will help those who wonder why we are considering investing in relatively expensive live-streaming equipment:

Q1. If we are already successfully recording a high-quality service and have been doing so for several months, why do we need to spend an estimated £2500+ in order to live-stream?

We have been able to provide high-quality services online because they are pre-recorded. Steve and I commit many hours each week making the services both appealing and professional. As a result, our services have proved very popular. According to YouTube we typically receive 40 views at the time the Sunday 10:00am service is broadcast. 40 views = 40 households and therefore exceeds how many attend church on a typical Sunday morning ie. my household of 5 people counts as 1 view. Additionally, many more people watch later on in the day/week. The question is whether we want to build on our recent success of outreach and make the most of the opportunities it gives us to engage with people who do not or cannot come to church, so serving God and His people well, or if we are content to reduce the quality of our online provision, which would arise if we do not expend on the necessary equipment required for the task.

Q2. What different equipment is needed?

The expenditure for live-streaming equipment includes £1650 for a PTZ camera (one that pans, tilts & zooms), and about £600 on a Blackmagic ATEM mini pro which will allow us to feed multiple video inputs into the live-stream (for example one or two cameras plus the PowerPoint slides). There are numerous other smaller costs (inc' a monitor for £90, cables, a bracket for the camera). We need to test whether the aging and unreliable Church laptop can handle live-streaming (we fear it will not and it would be a gamble to rely on it) in which case we may need to purchase another laptop (Est. £400). Ideally, we would purchase a second camera (<£1000) as this would make operating the equipment easier for the volunteer on duty and provide a better viewing experience. However, this would take us well above the estimated £2500 so we are trying to avoid that purchase if we can. These purchases are necessary if we would like the live streamed services to be anywhere near as watchable as the current online services and this will be an excellent way to fulfil our God given mission, which is to love God, love our neighbour, and go and make disciples. This is not a frivolous purchase - it is an investment in the central mission and ministry of St Paul's Church.

Q3. How did you arrive at the need to live-stream the services?

Following our survey, we discovered two thirds of our Church family felt unable to return when St. Paul's opens for public worship (either because they are shielding or because they feel it is unsafe), indicative that our on line participants will exceed those in church! The initial feedback when floating the idea of streamed services has been overwhelmingly positive, with neighbours, friends and family of church members (many of whom are have not been church attenders) reporting they are now sharing in our services. Additionally, some who were unable to attend in person are now able to participate and feel included (this includes local people who are housebound). Streaming services enables our "family" to feel connected, encouraged, gives spiritual hope and strength to allow them to grow in faith. The new equipment will deliver a service to those at home and enable people to actively participate as the words can continue to be displayed. Covid-19 threatens to stall the mission and ministry of the Church whereas this investment would enable it to continue and grow.

Q4. Why can't we use the same equipment we are using for our pre-recorded services?

This was kindly loaned in the short-term but cannot continue as a long-term solution, nor is it suitable to serve the new purpose of live streaming. Since the current situation is likely to continue for a lengthy period of time, the church needs now to purchase appropriate equipment to meet the task. Mobile phones have been used to date but are unsuitable for live-streaming as they need to be

operated at close range, which would pose a great distraction; the sound quality and versatility in the expanse of the church would be insufficient, with consequent poor results. Additionally, the words could not be added (currently edited post recording) and this in turn would exclude all at home from active worship.

Q5. Who is advising about the photographic equipment needed in order to record the live service?

The team of people running this project are myself, Steve Allen and Paul Brayshaw in consultation with Malcolm Hall. Matt, Steve and Paul are tech-savvy, as the past four months of online services demonstrates, and Malcolm is a professionally qualified audio-visual technician. Between us we have undertaken extensive research and have selected equipment that is used (and well-reviewed) by churches around the world – see above for details.

Q6. Why could we not purchase second-hand equipment for this purpose, which would be more economically viable?

We have explored this option but have not had any success finding the equipment we need at a suitable price. Additionally, we need the equipment to be fully guaranteed to protect the church purse and believe this is the responsible action.

Q7. Live streaming the service is likely to be for a relatively short period of time, how will this equipment be used to further promote the word of God to reach more people?

Every indication is that Covid-19 will be with us for a lengthy time and that a vaccine is not guaranteed. Even if the virus soon ceases to be a problem, we envisage live streaming our services as an ongoing innovation (explained in Q1) and as a blessing to those unable to be at church. It will also enable people to view a service should they miss one.

Live streaming acts as an advertisement for St Paul's. e.g. millennials typically watch an online service 6 times before attending in person and many people undertake online research before deciding which church to try; others want to become familiar with a service before plucking up courage to attend.

This may also give us the opportunity to provide church services to those who live in our local care homes and sheltered housing, enabling these communities to form part of our outreach family.

Q8. If we contribute to purchasing this equipment is there another way it might benefit the church?

Absolutely. We would be able to record weddings, recitals, choirs and concerts and potentially sell the recordings. We would be able to record the Church Pantomime, or even live stream it with a reimbursement for the church.

Most importantly, this will ensure our church family members and new members are fully engaged and moving forward within the body of the church, ready to re-join in reality once we are all free to do so – no price can be placed on that.

Q9. Could any of the money that has already been raised for the Sound System be diverted and used for this purpose?

When people donated towards the Sound Improvement Project, they did so with the expectation that their money would be spent on upgrading the sound system. In our application to the council for a grant we had to state what the money we had already raised would be spent on. This means the monies are ring-fenced, (meaning we are not free to spend it on something else).

Q10. Could we not raise a bid for a grant to assist with the cost of this or is time a constraint?

Theoretically that is a possibility, but this project is urgent for all the reasons outlined above. Applying for grants is a lengthy and time-consuming process e.g. we are still waiting for a grant to come through for the Sound Improvement Project even though we applied for it many months ago.