**Comments, Reflections and Answers to Questions from**

**COP Chat 10th February 2021**

From the opening devotions, I found it really moving to hear the diverse range of feelings everyone revealed in relation to thoughts about our current circumstances, church in the online world and the future as church returns to some sort of normality. I find it immensely valuable to be reminded we aren’t all feeling the same and we need to move forwards as churches in ways that are sensitive to this.

* Confused, unsure
* Excited
* Excited about the possibilities online church offers, and I don’t actually want to go back to physical church, so I’m not.
* Excited, apprehensive, hopeful, cautious
* Happy, anxious, meh
* Emotional sometimes
* Church: possibilities, excited
* Tired (physically), torn (managing the expectations on the reduced time/furlough)
* Fed up
* Uncertain – opportunities v frustration
* Excited for new possibilities, concerned that progress made will be lost
* Excited, but anxious at the same time. Tired!
* Conflicted, uncertain
* About church – excited and optimistic
* Apprehensive, but curious to see new opportunities
* Disconnected
* Excited, encouraged, frustrated, anxious (that we might shrink back when the world returns to ‘normal’)
* Excited, frustrated
* Church: it’s brought circuit together in all groups which are happening so that's excited
* Emotional, tired, uncertain
* Me – tired and anxious
* Loving the opportunities that online worship gives and not wanting to go back to normal church.
* Personally, apprehensive - we've such amazing opportunities to expand and engage, to move forward, I'm just so aware how quickly bad habits and "we've always done it this way". I don't want to see this time lost when things go back to "normal”. Fed up and tired!
* So grateful to still be working - from home - and hopeful that good will come from all of this …. alongside sadness of others sacrifices and losses
* It is inevitable that some will go back to 'we've always done it this way'......but there are enough of those/us that wish to move forward in a different way

**QUESTION/COMMENT 1**

I thought this was an interesting comment and would be a good topic for a much longer discussion; *‘At what point does presenting the best of yourself or your church become a false reality?’*

For me it is good to show the best of who we are and what we can do, but it is about keeping to being authentic and genuine, recognising that we do have faults and limitations and not going out of our way to ensure they are completely hidden or suppressed. I think much of it can be dependent on your interpretation of what authentic is and means.

I have come across many churches who are afraid to ‘label’ themselves as traditional in fear it will be off-putting for many people; it could well be off-putting for some people, but I know many people, both older and younger, that really value and appreciate what would be considered to be traditional forms and styles of worship and being church. I think it is really important to be very clear about who we are as churches and who we are as followers of Christ – people tend to identify with something more that isn’t perfect, like when a celebrity posts a non-photoshopped picture of stretch marks or wrinkles, so many people breathe a sigh of relief – I always breathe a sigh of relief when I talk to a ‘non-perfect’ Christian, who admits their struggles.

…but this is part of a bigger and highly interesting conversation and I think open to varied opinions.

**QUESTION/COMMENT 2**

*‘So, is grooming like manipulation?’*

Grooming is most definitely a type of manipulation and control. Grooming is the befriending and building a relationship with a person with the view to then manipulating them to do something. Grooming has tended to take place over a longer period of time, and involved using a variety of different ‘tactics’ for gaining a persons’ trust e.g. gifts, flattery, empathy, encouraging to distance from family and friends etc.

**QUESTION/COMMENT 3**

*‘It would be interesting to know about lay workers and staff's emails being publicly available, leaving us open to trolling and manipulation.’*

Generally, when you work for an organisation, your work email does become public so that people can contact you if necessary. It would be perhaps worth a conversation with your Line Management as to how ‘public’ your email needs to be. For some roles, such as admin roles, it would be unavoidable, but it may be for others that their details could be restricted.

It is important to ensure you have a separate work email.

There is the option to put ‘enquiry forms’ on church/circuit websites i.e. the individual has to fill out an enquiry form that gets sent to you, rather than your email being listed – this is sometimes a deterrent for people who would wish to harass an individual as it is more hassle to fill out an enquiry form and they don’t have your email (unless you respond to them), so if they wanted to target you, they would have to persistently fill out the form.

**QUESTION/COMMENT 4**

*‘Record keeping re social media. We are wondering about the keeping of information about people’s social media contact details both in terms of adults, and in a trickier way how/whether we can/should keep contact details about under 18s and the parental consent for this?’*

There is not yet any ‘official’ guidance on record keeping and social media, some of this will vary greatly depending on the social media platform used, for some platforms such as Facebook, there isn’t likely a need to keep any records, as people with Facebook accounts will choose whether or not to follow a specific church/circuit/project Facebook page. Other social media platforms, such as WhatsApp requires some information i.e. phone number and others may need an email such as Zoom etc. In these instances, it is important to follow GDPR rules, obtaining consent to hold the information (whether that be verbal or written consent), stating the clear purpose for using/keeping that information, ensuring that it is stored securely, having an opt in/opt out and the individual is aware of their right to have the information removed at any point.

In terms of children and young people, it needs to be clear whether the social media platform is age appropriate and consent does need to be obtained from parents/guardians when using social media platforms for church meetings/groups as you would face-to-face. The standard consent forms used for face-to-face activities can be adapted to join in with online group activities. Any permission forms can be filled in and signed electronically.

Hopefully, there will be much more guidance on this with the new social media policies.

**USEFUL WEBSITES/EMAILS POSTED IN CHAT**

Scam emails can be forwarded to [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

<https://www.net-aware.org.uk/>

Some things that people wanted to know more about – I will discuss some of these with our region of District Safeguarding Officers and see what could be made available, but have also put some links of further information/comments below for some things:

* *Different apps*

There are so many different apps and platforms, each works differently and has different regulations etc. I find <https://www.internetmatters.org/> useful as it explores online issues with each different platform/app, as well as general online issues.

* *Keeping a purely digital church safe i.e. ‘controlling’ people’s behaviours to ensure safe space.*

With the development of new social media guidelines, I am hoping this will be explored. I think there will be greater development of books, blogs etc. in this area as the church continues to remain digital/online. It is something that we are learning more about and perhaps will be able to provide a further session on.

* *Presenting authenticity – what exactly is authenticity, and when is the line crossed?*
* *Courses to point those who are new to online to warn them about scams etc, or even things we can run ourselves?*

I am not aware of any particular courses. The majority of online safety relates to young people and their parents, however; there is some good material out there for adults including Age UK who have put together some material specifically for older people and those who may be vulnerable [Staying safe online - tips for older people | Age UK](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/internet-security/)

* *Difficulties around Facebook admins who were posting different messages and dealing with difficult situations in various (and not always helpful) ways.*

The role of a Facebook Admin has always been somewhat undefined. I think we potentially need to begin viewing this as an official role within our churches and circuits and as such ensure the individual is safely recruited and has a role description, which identifies the parameters of that role. This role is very much what I would consider to be a ‘position of trust role,’ and therefore perhaps needs much further thought and consideration. I will explore a role description and guidelines for the role.