

Shaping our future: Responding to the unexpected!

Future leaders of the church will be well-equipped to respond to situations such as the current lockdown, says J-D Laurence, St Padarn's Tutor in St Davids Diocese

Who could have predicted, just a few months ago, that we would be living as we are now? The nature of church has had to change dramatically – or has it? Certainly, we can no longer gather in church buildings, but if the Church is the people of God then perhaps its true nature is, in fact, becoming more evident now than ever before.

God is still God, we are still his people, and the creation is still his creation. What has changed is not the *nature* of church but the way in which we *practise* church. We are facing the challenge to adapt to the current circumstances, as the global Church has always had to do throughout history and geography; think, for example, of the underground Church in persecuted regions where they cannot gather publicly nor make noise, their hymns sung in silent mouthed unison.

Will the Church adapt or die? Certainly, we are seeing admirable efforts all around us as parishes enter the often hitherto unexplored world of live streaming and online provision, in addition to keeping in telephone contact with those for whom the internet is a step too far. None of us knows for how long this will remain the *status quo*, but it seems unlikely that Church will ever be the same again. In the light of this, how are we training and equipping the church leaders of the future?

At St Padarn's, we have moved to delivering all teaching online, for both the full-time and part-time candidates. We are exploring the technological possibilities in order to ensure the dispersed community of learners remains a community, including holding virtual coffee times and virtual chapel, where we can communicate with one another as well as worship God together. The candidates are learning from direct experience how to navigate unexpected change, how to adapt forms of Church practice and to interact in new ways with online viewers who previously had not shown any interest in attending our services. As a result these new leaders will be a well-equipped generation to lead the Church into God's future, whatever that may look like. With every great challenge comes great opportunity!

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