**File:** **P1\_GMT20210715-115754\_Recording**  
**Duration:** **1:15:52**  
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**Typist:** **839**

START AUDIO

[00:02:50]

Respondent: Hi.

Ian: Hi, can you hear me okay?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: Great, great. Hi, nice to meet you.

Respondent: So are you Ian?

Ian: Yes, I am.

Respondent: Great.

Ian: Sorry, I just… It’s my daughter’s first day at nursery today and I’ve got a little app and they just sent me some updates so I just got all over excited and it’s a bit emotional. How are you?

Respondent: Alright thank you, yes.

Ian: Great. [ANON PERSON] obviously put me in touch with, hopefully, several people who have community roles in the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] area. She started with the partnership. Then I also didn’t read [ANON PERSON]’s email properly after I sent over the thing, so apologies for not using your title.

Respondent: Oh no, that doesn’t matter at all. (Laughter) I don’t really go in for that all that much so don’t worry.

Ian: Oh good. Yes, well we all have titles in academia as well and we don’t really use ours but I just thought because one of the other people was Councillor [COUNCILLOR]. Because I, kind of, knew the councillors I automatically did that and then I realised, “Oh, I should’ve done that for everyone.” I’m glad you weren’t offended.

Respondent: No, I didn’t even notice. (Laughter)

Ian: Good, good. The purpose of the project- I’m sure you’ve read the information but, in just sort of brief lay terms, [ANON PERSON] approached us about, not necessarily problems but just, things she’d noticed about online communication and stuff in the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] area. Approached us about, as many people do in our lab, like, “Maybe we need a new website, maybe we need a new app or something?” So, just to start the explorations of that, we’ve created a research project. The first stage of that is just speaking to people. That’s what today is about really.

First of all, do you have any questions about-?

Respondent: No, no, no.

Ian: Okay. The other thing is, obviously, we’re using Zoom. Do not feel in any way obliged to have your camera on because that’s not important at all. All I want from this is… The reason I’m recording it is I’ll do a transcription. After that, you will remain anonymous to the point of being participant X. I hope that’s all alright.

I’ve got a list of questions to try to keep it the same for everyone, so I’ll just start going through some of them. It’s just a kind of question guide so it’s fine if we go off on tangents and stuff like that but… Yes, so as not to waste time, I’ll just get going if that’s okay? Great.

How long have you lived or worked in the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] area?

Respondent: About two and a half years.

Ian: Okay. Do you live in the area now or just work?

Respondent: No, I live there.

Ian: Brilliant. Which of the villages do you live or work in, of the four?

Respondent: I live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and I work in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME], and [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: Actually, I looked at the… Is [REDACTED PLACE NAME] the village with the beach?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: Yes, I saw… I was looking at details online, there’s a beautiful church down there.

Respondent: Yes. That’s the only church building but we also work in… There’s not really a lot to do in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] other than there’s the church there. We do a lot of work in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and a bit in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] as well so, yes.

Ian: Great. Although you’re pretty new to the area, what do you think are the main differences between the villages?

Respondent: Right. I don’t officially work in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] but I have been to [REDACTED PLACE NAME] to do some things. Very roughly, I would say [REDACTED PLACE NAME] has a fairly middle class feel to it. My next door neighbour has got Audis, people round here have got BMWs. It’s fairly nice. There are a couple of miner’s cottages but really it’s a fairly middle class place, [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

[REDACTED PLACE NAME], there’re about 200 people that actually live there, very few children, if at all, who live there. [REDACTED PLACE NAME], you’ve got to have a bit of money to live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] or they’re holiday houses. Of course, then there’re two holiday parks, caravan parks. There’re a few people who live there year-round.

Then [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is just a totally different kettle of fish. It is fairly deprived, quite deprived really. There’s a lot of need in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. It’s quite rough in a lot of ways, there’s a very strong mining memory. There’s kind of like a divide, really, between the old mining families who’ve been there for years and years and years and then kind of like the newcomers who’ve basically been shipped in from council estates maybe, from elsewhere in Northumberland or outside.

Then there is, kind of, a… I think [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is very much a mining village as well but on a much smaller scale than [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is tiny. There’s a bit of a traveller community as well, which seems to spread itself. There’s a little camp in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] but there are some Travellers in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and some Travellers in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] as well. There’re quite a few little communities that are quite distinct.

Ian: Okay, great. Just to say, I’ve worked with [ANON PERSON] during my PhD as well, a few years ago, so I do have a rough idea about the villages but it’s just nice to hear it from different people’s perspectives.

Respondent: There’s quite a lot of hostility towards the Travellers if you… I mean I’ve had conversations with people where I’ve had to say, “Okay, well we’re not going to speak like that.” There is some, what you would probably call, racism towards the Travellers. They are at the root of everything that’s bad. You know, if something’s gone wrong it’s them that’s done it. Do you know what I mean?

Ian: Yes. So it’s kind of othering but also, kind of, discrimination as well?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: I guess some of that… I guess the communities do kind of rub up against each other sometimes as well.

Respondent: It is, literally, 99.9% White around here, no diversity.

Ian: Yes. I live in Northumberland now, I’m not from Northumberland, and I’ve found that everywhere I go in Northumberland. I don’t think it’s a case of just villages on the east coast. That’s a different matter.

Okay. What do you think the villages have in common?

Respondent: There’s this sense of history that they have.

Ian: A shared sense?

Respondent: Yes, I think. Where I lived before was in [ANON PLACE], it was a couple of mining communities in [ANON PLACE] that I lived in. Then I came up here, again living in mining communities but the memory of the mining is like on steroids here compared to there.

They have this, especially [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME], even though [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is a bit more middle class now, they have this history of the mining and the miners’ strike as well. [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is a bit of an anomaly because [REDACTED PLACE NAME] was more connected with the Baker-[REDACTED PLACE NAME]s and the more landed gentry type. I think [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME], and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] have definitely got this shared mining memory that’s very strong.

Ian: Great. The next thing I was going to ask you is, “Is there anything particular about the area?” Would you just say what you said there would answer that?

Respondent: Yes, I think so. I think the sense of family is probably a lot stronger, especially in places like [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: Okay, great. Sense of family, so is that…?

Respondent: In [REDACTED PLACE NAME], for example, when I first arrived somehow I managed to get on the right side of the right people. If I’d have got on the wrong side of those people it wouldn’t have just been them that I would be on the wrong side of, it would be their whole family that I was on the wrong side of even if I’d never spoken to their whole family. It’s kind of the networks and the loyalties within the networks, so if you get in with the right people then it’s easier for you to be trusted as an outsider. There’s definitely this sense of insiders and outsiders.

Ian: Do you think that’s a case of, maybe, like, “I’ve lived in this house for five generations.” So there’s a… I don’t know, is it worth calling it horizontal or vertical? There’s kind of this vertical family like, “My family have been here forever so I’ve got ownership, a sense of identity in this area.” Or is it also-? The way you described it there felt more like a lot of who people know in their village are also their family, so families are kind of spread around the village.

Respondent: Yes. Some of the families are massive. An interesting thing about it is that it’s the women who are… I would say that, in a strange way, the mining communities are quite matriarchal. The women are the strength, the women are the organisers, the women are the ones who get stuff done.

One particular family in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] that I’m thinking about is… There must be, what, one, two, three, at least four generations of women. You know, one of those generations is babies but four generations of women who are living very closely together. Not necessarily in the same house but possibly on the same street and not necessarily with men around, not necessarily men who stick around. The women remain.

Ian: It’s really interesting. Yes, that’s really interesting. Yes, I’m just getting loads of thoughts about, typically, things that might be described as just like inner city and urban things there but-

Respondent: Yes, I think quite a lot of estate… You know, so in terms of the church, you talk about estate’s ministry which is quite… You know, the same things on the outer estates of a city, you get a similar kind of matriarchal culture that I’ve observed in such places. It is a fairly similar scenario.

Ian: I’ve got some questions about ruralness a bit later on but then I just kind of, my head jumped ahead a bit there because that just sounds very much how people, at least stereotypically, are characterised in impoverished urban neighbourhoods.

Okay. For you, what is the best thing about living in the area?

Respondent: I think it’s the people because I have to say that I’ve been here… I think I arrived in the November. By the following August I was ready to leave because it’s fairly isolated out here. In the church I work in there’s nobody my age, they’re all much older. It is quite isolated, it’s hard to make friends, and the job that I’m in is quite busy, odd hours. It’s not as easy as it could be. It’s four hours from where I used to live, where all my family and friends are.

I very nearly did leave but the people, especially the people in my congregation, were just lovely. Some vicars have churches where they’ll go to a church council meeting and they’ll come away in tears because it’s toxic. Here we have a laugh, people want to try new things, they’re very flexible. I wouldn’t have stayed if it wasn’t for the people.

Ian: Great. I know what your job is, so to speak, but how would you describe your role? I guess if you work in different sorts of churches or anything anyway-

Respondent: Yes, well my role is actually… I’m a priest in charge but I’m also a pioneer minister. Pioneer minister is about helping people to do church in new and different ways because if the old ways were working the church would be growing and really it’s not. So it’s kind of opening people’s eyes to new things.

Also, for me personally, the way I see my job is to make relationships and build trust in the community because the church does not necessarily always have the greatest reputation in the community. Especially in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], some people are quite… Not necessarily antagonistic towards the church but they’re very ambivalent, they don’t really care.

One thing the school has found, the school is a Church of England school and they found that if they call something a service, an end of term service, parents will not come to it. If you use the word ‘service’ or ‘prayer’ or ‘church’ they will not come. There is this kind of indifference to church.

Of course, we did have a church building in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. It was unsustainable to keep it going so it was sold, which meant that the church community and the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] community thought that there was no church in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. What I’ve done- A lot of my work has been to show the community that the church is in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. It’s not here preaching at you but it is helping you. We are here because we want to help you and we want to help to make life better for you. We have done a lot of work with [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and Bacmans in the community, things where actually church does not come into it. We’re not here to preach at you.

We started a bacon rolls and coffee and tea at the early years centre when parents drop their children off on a Monday morning. All that was is getting to know people and them getting to know us to build the trust. We’re doing the holiday club with Bacmans over the summer. There’s no God in it but we are here to help them.

We also have a legacy. We have no money as a church at all but we do have £100,000 legacy which was left to us. Basically, it’s been ignored for about 10 years because nobody really knew how to handle it. We’re sorting it out now and we’re establishing a fund that people in the community can apply to, that will finance… We want it to finance activities and projects that will bring hope to the community. That’s what we want to do, we want to bring hope because that’s the Christian value that people can understand, especially in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. It is for use in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], the legacy, specifically.

Ian: Okay. Just out of interest, what happened to the church building in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], was it knocked over?

Respondent: Oh, it became a marijuana growing den.

Ian: Unofficially?

Respondent: It was sold to a developer who got planning permission, I think, and started to turn it into flats and then just abandoned it, essentially, because ran out of money. It became very dilapidated. Then, about Christmas time last year the police swooped on it and it was found that people had been using it as a place to grow marijuana. I think, now, a developer has got into it again but who knows, who knows?

Ian: What a shame. My next couple of questions are about how you participate in the community but I think you’ve, mainly, covered that because, for you, your kind of role is about-

Respondent: Well I do a fair bit actually. I’m on the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] partnership. I am a trustee of the Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust which has six primary schools, a secondary school, and a special school. They, kind of, operate, really, in Ashington, Newbiggin… Yes, mainly Ashington and Newbiggin but one of the schools is in [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: Are the schools in Ashington formerly like Bothal Middle School and…?

Respondent: Well, so the school- I don’t know what the-

Ian: Sorry, in Ashington I meant to say.

Respondent: Ashington is Duke’s Secondary, Josephine Butler Campus, then there’s Grace Darling in somewhere-

Ian: Okay.

Respondent: Grace Darling, Thomas Bewick, I can’t remember, James Knott, and William Leech in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. Then I’m also a governor at [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Primary School. Yes, so we just collaborate a lot with Bacmans.

Also, something really exciting that I haven’t told you, we’re working in collaboration with Widdrington and Ulgham parish to set up a debt advice centre in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. Part of that is done in partnership with Bacmans. Together Newcastle have kind of helped us to set up. We’ve done a lot of research, Bacmans and I think the foodbank in Widdrington Station are involved.

It’s kind of a need because people in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] don’t really have access to great public transport and there is a reticence to go somewhere like the Citizens Advice in Ashington. They just won’t go but they will talk to Christina at Bacmans because they trust her and they know her. Christina is now on the steering group for the debt advice centre.

It’s part of a… We’re kind of affiliated to an organisation called Community Money Advice, what happens is they provide training which is accredited debt advice training with the Financial Regulation Authority or whatever it’s called, I don’t know. You know, it’s basically very, very, properly accredited training. They have all the policies that you can doctor for your context and… We’re at the very early stages of establishing that at the moment. I think we’re hoping to get some money from the wind farms to establish ourselves.

The debt advice centre is seen as quite a need in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] so we’re kind of hoping to have that set up in, maybe, a year’s time. It kind of takes that length of time to get the training and everything in place so…

Ian: That’s exciting. What they do have in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], despite many of the things they don’t have, is they do have those two large buildings which ostensibly could be used for things like that. Bacmans have one of those buildings, pretty much, to themselves, I think, do they?

Respondent: Yes. We have… What I’ve done is I’ve worked really hard. I’ve seen it as my job to work really hard to make networks in the community. Bacmans has actually, well Bacmans and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] really have been very important in doing that. Being on the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] partnership actually has done a lot of things because it’s helped me to understand the needs of a community because of all the background work that’s already been done. So I don’t have to come in fresh and do it myself. Also it’s, kind of, helped me, I think, to become trusted more quickly. Yes, Bacmans and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] have been really great.

Ian: Yes. That’s really interesting, actually, in terms of, I guess, how trust and acceptance works. People that already have established trust and things like that, yes. I guess that’s quite a common thing. If you were to write up a kind of book of tactics in going in and being accepted in a community-

Respondent: Well that’s what it is isn't it? It sounds really mercenary but it is.

Ian: No, no.

Respondent: It’s a strategy. When you write this up, do not make me sound like-

Ian: To be honest, most of the stuff we’ve talked about so far is… Probably, much of it is just about establishing context. Much-

Respondent: It is a strategy, it is. With the best will in the world, you come in and you’ve got a job to do. Actually making networks and building trust in the community is a very… You know, that’s what your strategy needs to be. You need the community with you, don’t you? You need to be with the community so, yes-

Ian: There’re definitely parallels. I used to be a schoolteacher and now I lecture at the university. We could speak in the same terms. We know we can help the students but we need tactics and strategies to make them trust and listen to us and-

Respondent: I did a leadership course last February at Windsor, which was like a weeklong course. There were people on it from the army, the air force, the police force, Shell, BP, the probation service, all of that, all kind of leaders. Really, what you realised is, “Whatever area you work in, you’re dealing with the same basic situations and the same basic strategies that you need that will help you or improve what you’re doing.” It was really interesting.

Ian: Ex[REDACTED PLACE NAME]ent. Do you consider the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] area to be rural?

Respondent: I would call it semi-rural I think. It is quite isolated. I have to drive for 10 minutes before I can get petrol. There are not a lot of amenities nearby. The public transport system is bad. It is isolated in its way. It’s very pretty and there’s farmland around and you’re very close to greenery but I wouldn’t call it rural in the way that some places are rural. You’ve not got one house on a hill and the next house is a mile away and all of that. I think that it possibly shares some similarities to rural places, especially in terms of amenities and transport. I’m thinking of…

You know like how you brought up more urban areas. My experience of more urban areas is the public transport is a lot better. I lived in kind of like a multicultural area on the outskirts of the city in [ANON PLACE] and you could walk down the street and there was a big Co-op, there were some takeaways, there was a bank even, and the public transport was good. So it was deprived but there were amenities and transport.

Whereas here [REDACTED PLACE NAME], especially, is very deprived. On a Sunday there’s one bus every two hours to get you to [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. If you live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] you have to get two busses to get to the surgery in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] which is the only surgery within those four villages. You have to get a bus from [REDACTED PLACE NAME] to Ashington and then from Ashington to [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. Actually it’s a few miles but you have to get two busses to get there so it’s… You know, that’s my view on it anyway.

Ian: No, no, it is interesting. The way people often would describe things being rural was things you touched on there. You often talk about proximity to other things and proximity to services. You also touched on that there’s greenery and it looks pretty and…

Respondent: Oh, it does look pretty. It’s also pretty dreadful in the winter when it’s freezing cold and the wind is blowing and it feels quite grim at that point. Yes, I would… I know that when the diocese, the Newcastle diocese which we’re part of, did some rural case studies they did include our parish as one of the rural case studies. I think they, the diocese, view us, our parish, as a rural parish but I wouldn’t fully say it was, I would say it was semi.

Ian: Yes, good. You kind of touched on it at first but just to go… What is missing from the parish that makes it only semi-rural rather than rural, what would make it rural to you? I know these are probably hard questions because they’re not things you think of every day.

Respondent: I don’t know whether my interpretation of rural is correct but when I think of rural I think of, I suppose, much smaller villages.

Ian: Is that in terms of population?

Respondent: Yes, in terms of population. Things a bit more spread out. I went on a run today. I try to do a 10k once a week. I can do 10k by going from my house through [REDACTED PLACE NAME], from [REDACTED PLACE NAME] to [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and back to [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. That’s about 10k so it’s kind of… It’s not necessarily- The places are not massively spread out, they’re fairly close together. Yes, I don’t know. I would just say that rural is a bit more spread out, fewer people living in the places.

Ian: Yes, so it’s more the proximity of other villages which would make it rural?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Maybe if you just took- I mean what was the one with the smallest population, you said [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. If you just took [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and moved the other three villages 10 miles away?

Respondent: Yes, I might then.

Ian: You’d say [REDACTED PLACE NAME] was rural?

Respondent: My friend is a vicar in a rural parish and it involves a lot of… She had to change her car because it soon became apparent that her car was not up to rural ministry because you have to drive around for miles up hills and dales and country roads where there might not be great roadage, you know, not great… (Laughter) You know what I mean?

Ian: Yes. So they had to trade in their hatchback for a Land Rover?

Respondent: Yes, [that kind of thing 00:37:03], yes.

Ian: That is rural, yes?

Respondent: Harvest festival on a tractor with the farmer, you know what I mean, that kind of thing.

Ian: Okay, yes. So the industries around it are still traditional farming and things like that, yes? When you said your definition, there’s… I’ve done a lot of research in sociology and stuff around how people define rurality. Everyone’s got different ideas, it’s a real tricky word actually but I just find it super-interesting.

Respondent: I think the label that I would probably put on where we live is kind of a post-industrial place. You know, post-mining community where… It’s like they used to have a real identity and now what is that identity? Nobody is really sure because what gave them their identity is gone.

Ian: Yes. I think that’s one of the big questions that I, kind of, am thinking about. Even though we’re thinking about information systems, these sorts of things are important. Rurality, in itself, people really grab onto that and go, “We are rural.” That is an identity in itself. You start thinking of words like ‘charming’, ‘idyllic’, and... Maybe these aren’t the right words to describe the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] area.

Respondent: There is real antagonism, I would say, especially between [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. There was a day trip that was organised to Alnwick Garden. People from [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] were invited on it. I think they picked people up in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] first and then the bus went through to [REDACTED PLACE NAME] to pick the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] people up. There were people in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] who saw who was on the bus and were like, “I’m not getting on that bus, I’m not going if she’s going.” There is a bit of friction between the two, yes.

Ian: Yes. Semi-rural, post-industrial… You said you lived in [ANON PLACE] which is kind of a big established city. If we just start to think about technology, do you think technology is used differently in the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] area compared to somewhere like in a city like [ANON PLACE]?

Respondent: I can tell you the experience we’ve had over the pandemic especially. I have several very active members of my congregation who do not have internet access. They don’t have any internet in their home, they don’t own a computer. When the pandemic started, they’d been extremely active in the church but when we had to move everything online… We moved our services online. They couldn’t access them. I sent out paper copies of everything to people and they did a few things together over the garden wall.

In the end, what we did was we bought some fairly cheap smartphones and I did an absolute idiot’s- Not calling them idiots but, you know, like an absolute idiot’s guide with photos of what the screen looked like to show them how to use the phone. Basically, because what we’d done when the pandemic started was we started a WhatsApp group for the congregation. I wanted them to be able to access the WhatsApp group and to understand how to use that. Also our services were done on Facebook Live and I wanted them to be able to access the Facebook services.

Really, all they use that phone for is WhatsApp and Facebook. They’ve got their own mobile but it’s not a smartphone. They do use the WhatsApp and the Facebook to access the church. It has been surprising actually, I was very surprised, that some people in particular, who are in their 70s and 80s and 90s, have… I also make a YouTube video of the service because some people will go nowhere near Facebook even though you can view things and not be part of Facebook. So I do a YouTube video. I’ve got these very elderly people who are happy to watch the YouTube video every week of the service, so that’s been quite interesting.

I wouldn’t say that… I think it’s hard to get the picture because everything has changed so much. I wouldn’t say that, before the pandemic, I used the internet differently to how I did before in terms of communicating what was going on at church. We have a website, we had a Facebook page beforehand anyway. I think we did, yes we did… I would say we communicated in the same way but I realised that there were many more people in my congregation who did not have access to technology than in the previous places I lived.

We do our church council meetings by Zoom at the moment. I have a couple of ladies who phone in because they can’t do the computer version but they can phone in and listen to it. Other people… I’ve got a 91-year-old lady who does Zoom for the church council, she watches the Facebook videos.

What it has done, actually, has been very interesting. Sorry, I could talk a very long time about this.

Ian: This is like the actual heart of everything I want to talk about so this is amazing, you’re just going through my questions for me.

Respondent: I’ve got one lady who is in her 90s. I’ve been here two and a half years. I’ve got one lady who is in her 90s who lives in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], has never been in the church building while I have been here. She doesn’t have transport to get into church, she’s not very firm on her feet anyway. She hasn’t really been to church services since I’ve been here but she watches, every day she watches the Facebook services.

She’s in her 90s but she’s got access to Facebook. She knows what she’s doing, how to find the church Facebook page. Because of the pandemic and because we were kind of forced into operating online in a way that we didn’t before, she has engaged with her church in a way that wasn’t possible before. A lot of churches are finding this, that…

Actually it’s become a bit of a double-edged sword really because it’s now increased my workload because even though we’re back in the building I can’t let go of the online stuff because actually the online stuff is reaching people and helping people that couldn’t access the church before.

I do Facebook services every day. We have morning and evening prayer every day. Each service lasts, basically, 6 minutes so it’s not a massive drain on anybody’s time. I would say, probably, there’re about 15 regulars in the morning and fewer than that in the evening. Then the same on a Sunday morning plus the people who watch the YouTube video plus the people who actually come to the church building. The people who are watching our morning and evening prayer and Sunday Facebook service aren’t even necessarily living in Northumberland. What has happened is…

We had a lady who moved to [REDACTED PLACE NAME] in the pandemic, a lady and a gentleman but it’s the lady who watches the Facebook services. She moved to [REDACTED PLACE NAME] from down south somewhere in the pandemic. The church wasn’t open at that point but she started watching our Facebook services and then she came to church, now she’s become part of the community.

So, actually, we have absolutely changed how… Well not changed how we use technology but we have used technology in new ways during the pandemic. It’s actually really strengthened our community. The WhatsApp group that we set up right at the beginning has actually brought the church community really close together because they… Some of them, beforehand, they’d be there on a Sunday, they’d have a cup of coffee, they’d go home, they wouldn’t see each other until the next Sunday and they wouldn’t communicate during that time.

Now WhatsApp is pinging every day and people are sending funny little videos or a picture of something that they’ve seen that’s great or encouraging somebody or… It’s really, kind of, brought them closer together.

Ian: There’re loads of things… I wish I’d written down what I was thinking while you were talking but… In general, these people you’re talking about who saw each other once a week and are now… It sounds like a general family or friendship WhatsApp group. What stopped them doing that before the pandemic, was it because these are the people you’ve given smartphones to or you’ve at least shown how to use them?

Respondent: I don’t think it ever occurred to them. When I arrived, there wasn’t even an email list of people. Nobody was communicated with by email. I just thought… Sometimes when you arrive in a- No disrespect to the previous vicar but sometimes you arrive somewhere and think, “What have you been doing?” There was no… When I arrived I put out the GDPR form, “Can we contact you by email?” all of this. For the first time, I actually had a full contact list of people from church and I had email addresses. Now I can send out emails to everybody, that’s a whole new thing that’s opened up.

I honestly don’t think it would’ve occurred to anybody at church to make a WhatsApp group.

Ian: You’ve talked about the Facebook Live, the YouTube which I’m guessing is a recording of the Facebook Live that is-

Respondent: Yes. Basically, what I do is I use it as a dry run. I make the YouTube video earlier on in the week, then that’s my kind of dry run for the Sunday Facebook service. However, things are going to change the last week of this month.

At the moment, what we do is we have a 10 o’clock Facebook Live service which lasts no longer than 20 minutes. It’s normally about 15 minutes. Then we have an 11:30 service in the church. That has generally… The 11:30 service has been because 2 of our ladies need to catch a bus and the bus only comes every 2 hours, and the person who would normally give them a lift is not giving lifts at the moment because they’re still a bit cautious about coming to church.

Now things are opening up a bit more, people want their children christened again. In order to be able to accommodate the christenings we’re going to have to move our service time back to the original 10:30 in the church service, which means that what will happen is there will no longer be a Facebook live service. I will just post the YouTube video onto the Facebook page.

Ian: So you’re doing everything twice at the minute, you’re not just saying-?

Respondent: Basically, I’m doing everything twice. Yes, because I’ve got those people who… I’m probably only talking about ten households here, so I’m not talking a massive amount of people. For them, it is significant because they will… When I moved here there was a little bit of an old guard and they wouldn’t come to anything new that I did but, several times, they have complimented the YouTube video. For me, the fact that they wouldn’t come to anything new I was doing but during the pandemic they have engaged with that is worth doing a 15-minute video for people like that who still are very cautious.

My congregation are very cautious about coming back into the church building. The Facebook service and the YouTube video have been a bit of a lifeline for them.

The daily prayer, the morning and evening prayer, especially at the beginning of the pandemic I think was very much a lifeline for people because nobody knew what was happening and they wanted something that was constant that they knew they could rely on. When you do it at the same time every morning and every evening it’s kind of… I know that one person said to me, “When I get to the evening prayer I know that I’ve made it through another day.”

Ian: Yes. Yes, I can understand that, a bit of… It’s kind of normality and it’s also a bit of regular… As you say, it’s like a sense of routine and it makes people feel sort of safe.

I know you said there was nothing before you got there but you’ve set up things like email and things like that. You didn’t do- I’m guessing, from what you’ve said so far, before the pandemic you never… You had a Facebook page but you didn’t use Facebook Live, you didn’t do YouTube, you didn’t do WhatsApp etc.

Respondent: I’ve learned so much. I have learned, basically, how to do Facebook Live, I’ve learned how to post things to YouTube, I’ve learned how to edit videos, I’ve learned how to do… I also do something for the diocese, I do a children and family service every week. I make a little story and I do stop-motion animation and voiceovers. I’ve learned to do so much stuff, like technology-wise. Nothing is very fancy but I can edit a video, I can do a stop-motion animation, I’m kind of proficient in a few things now that I never was before.

Ian: Okay, yes, that’s good then because what I was wondering is… I know that we’ve got dates coming up where we’re coming out of lockdown and whatever. I know some of your congregation might still not want to come back to church. Just say that, tomorrow, everything went back to normal, everything was safe. You could, if you wanted, go back to having just your email list because everyone was coming back to the church. What would you keep?

Respondent: What would I keep?

Ian: Yes. So these new skills you’ve learned…

Respondent: Yes. I would keep the morning and evening prayer.

Ian: Which is Facebook?

Respondent: Yes, I would keep the Facebook because I think actually if you did morning and evening prayer every day in the church building nobody would come to it. If you do it on Facebook live people can be sitting in bed with their pyjamas on and they will watch a six-minute service in bed and that… You know like, “Well, job done, that’s excellent. I’ve got 15 people come to morning prayer.” That would never happen if we did it in a building, so I would definitely keep that.

I have been thinking about this because there is a problem that is going to arise, which is actually… When are you going to write all this up?

Ian: Oh it might take-

Respondent: It’s going to take a while isn't it?

Ian: Yes. You’re the first person I’m speaking to, and I’m hoping to speak to-

Respondent: Oh, well this is- Basically the Church of England is the most stupid organisation in the entire world. I am not allowed to tell my parish this until I’m given authorisation to do so, but I’m actually leaving. I’m not entirely sure when, probably October.

I’m the one who does all the technology, so I don’t know what’s going to happen. What I am hoping is that we can keep the morning and evening prayer going because it’s a very easy format. Anybody could just pick it up and read it. I’ve got a couple of people who are proficient enough to be able to do it on Facebook Live, so I’m hoping that they will take that on and keep that up. In terms of everything else, I don’t think it’s going to continue. I don’t think they’ll be a YouTube video anymore after-

Ian: I mean it’s so… It won’t surprise you to know how often we hear this in any sector, in any part of society, the amount of things that rely on one volunteer who has upskilled themselves to make it better for everyone. Then things… Yes, that’s-

Respondent: I’m not leaving- See this is the interesting- I’m not leaving because of anything to do with the job or the community. I love the people in my church, I think they are great. This job is great but my dad had some strokes and is now disabled, and I’m four hours away. I can’t be this far away from him, I have to go but…

Ian: I’m really sorry to hear about that.

Respondent: I’ve known since March that I’ve got this job but I’m still not allowed to tell anybody about it because of the stupid Church of England rules and legalities and bits and bobs that need to be done. I’m hoping, in the next couple of weeks, I can tell people. Then I can actually say to people, “Right, do you want to try doing morning and evening prayer on Facebook?” I can’t do that beforehand because then people will get suspicious and I’ll get in trouble.

The WhatsApp group will continue, nobody needs to worry about that.

Ian: Well if I put it another way, so you… I assume you’ll go to a different church and… If you are, yes, of these Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, email, whatever, is there anything-? On your first day in your new job, would you be like, “We need to do this?”

Respondent: Basically, where I’m going is… There would be nothing against us, really, livestreaming from the church.

Ian: Yes, so you only have to do it once?

Respondent: Yes, but we don’t have… A, we don’t have any licences for streaming music. B, we don’t have an internet connection. Getting reliable, even, phone signal in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is really difficult so actually livestreaming anything, even on your phone, from [REDACTED PLACE NAME] church is probably not going to happen. Where I’m going is… Basically the church where I am now, on a good day, had about 30 people on a Sunday. The church where I’m going next has maybe 150 people on a Tuesday, has a technology team. Do you know what I mean? They’re well set up for this and… I do feel really guilty, I feel really bad about going, but I need to.

In other ways, I think that people have learned a lot, over the pandemic especially, they have learned a lot technology-wise. Two of my ladies have learned how to use Facebook and how to use WhatsApp. Other of my ladies have learned how to use Canva to make posters and how to post them onto- They’ve been made an administrator of the Facebook page and they’ve learned how to do that. They’ve all learned how to use Zoom. I think that everybody has learned some skills. It’s not going to be the ideal situation when I disappear off but, who knows, it might actually bring people out of the woodwork, who knows?

Ian: Yes, of course. Hopefully you’ve inspired people to think, “We can use these things.” and then they’ll stay but…

Respondent: Oh, I mean one thing I forgot to tell you, one thing I forgot to tell you is one of my ladies, they do a toddler group, they used to do a toddler group in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. She must be 70 odd. She’s been making little videos of her reading a story or singing a song and putting them on the toddler group Facebook page, so they’ve been keeping that up as well. That was totally her just wanting to keep up with all the mums and the toddlers, so she’s just learned how to make videos and post them to Facebook.

Ian: That is great. I’ve seen a few lovely examples of people doing things for children and youth groups, actually, in terms of creating different video content, reading stories and things like that.

I’ve seen a lovely thing, it was a talk I went to, it was in America but they asked the community- It was a place, similar to probably some of the villages where you are now, where there’re a lot of older people. They basically went round and got all the older people to either read stories or tell stories from their life, then created this archive. Then there were children sitting in a library listening to them. It was so lovely. It was a way of connecting parts of the community together that wouldn’t normally rub shoulders.

I know we’re at the end of the hour now. Have you just got a couple more minutes for me to ask a couple of things about the Facebook group?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: So it’s a Facebook page, not a group?

Respondent: Yes, Facebook-

Ian: Yes?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: So you are an administrator and you’ve made some of the parishioners administrators?

Respondent: Yes, yes. Actually there’s me. There’s the associate minister who works two days a week, she’s an administrator. She does evening prayer on a Friday, and she sometimes does the Sunday morning Facebook service as well. Then there’s another lady who is an administrator who is able to make… I’m a bit snobbish about any publicity that we produce, I do not like ClipArt on it or anything like that. We use Canva, I’ve taught her how to use Canva. She’ll make a poster on Cava and she’ll put it onto- She knows how to put it onto the Facebook page. She’s an admin as well, and she kind of keeps on top of the messages that are sent so…

Ian: Are you broadcast-only on that Facebook page? Do you or one of the other admins, i.e. like the church, put out information and then people use it as a kind of noticeboard or do people also comment or add-?

Respondent: Yes, so we put out information on what we’re doing, we share it with various community pages as well. We’ll share it to the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] community page… Yes, the [REDACTED PLACE NAME], the [REDACTED PLACE NAME], and the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] community pages. We share it, probably, with [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and Bacmans as well, so kind of use the share facility I suppose.

Ian: So you’ll put out a post and then you’ll try to get it reposted in other people’s-?

Respondent: Yes, yes, yes.

Ian: In the local-ish Facebook groups?

Respondent: Yes. It works really well. For example, Good Friday… The last two years, on Good Friday, we’ve done lighting candles for people who’ve died. We’ll ask people to send us names of people that they want their names to be read out. A lot of that just came through Facebook through comments on the post that had been shared. We must have done about 100 names.

Ian: Yes, I was going to say that’s really nice but it’s actually really sad because you’re doing names of people that have died but [Crosstalk 01:05:52]-

Respondent: [Crosstalk] but actually it looked really effective when it was dark and then, one by one, the candles are lit and the names are read, then you’ve got this kind of light in the darkness. It looked really good.

Ian: Yes, yes. I guess you recorded that stuff and put it on the Facebook page as well.

Respondent: Yes, well we did that as a live… It was a livestream.

Ian: Yes, ex[REDACTED PLACE NAME]ent. Do you let people comment on your posts, do you let people post things in that group?

Respondent: We don’t let people post things. I don’t think we do, I’m fairly sure we don’t.

Ian: But people can comment on your posts?

Respondent: People can comment on anything, yes, yes, yes. They can send us a message but I don’t think they can post anything.

Ian: I’m not a Facebook user so I’m not sure the difference between pages and groups and things like that but… Yes, so you don’t necessarily…?

Respondent: Yes, I think in a group you can post.

Ian: Yes, and on a page people can just comment?

Respondent: Yes, yes, yes.

Ian: Do you moderate these comments if somebody…? Do people tend to just, sort of, say, “Yes, I’ll be along.” or, “That looks nice.”?

Respondent: Yes, I’ve had nothing that I’ve had to query or delete or anything like that so-

Ian: Yes, yes, and you don’t get people hijacking it saying…? So you might do a really popular post about something on Good Friday or around Easter weekend where you’re probably going to get more activity, you won’t get people, for example, saying, “Does anyone want to buy this bike?”

Respondent: If anybody in the community tried that, and did that, they would get taken down by somebody. Somebody would be on them and tell them that was not appropriate. I think that we have become liked enough in the community, and respected enough in the community, for people who like us not to stand for that, especially in communities that are quite small and everybody knows everybody.

Ian: So you think the Facebook page, very much, echoes how people would treat the people or the buildings?

Respondent: Yes. I mean we’re very non-controversial anyway.

Ian: Yes, yes. Yes, so the behaviours that you might expect people to do if they come to the congregation or whatever are kind of-?

Respondent: Yes, it’s not Twitter.

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: We don’t have any trolls.

Ian: Yes. I thought it would be more like people just sort of going, “I’m also doing an event, does anyone want to come to my thing?” You know, just things like that.

Respondent: No, no. I think because they can’t post then, no, that doesn’t happen.

Ian: Do you actively look at the other local Facebook groups, apart from posting to them?

Respondent: The funny thing is that the algorithm on Facebook doesn’t really show me a lot of them, so it’s only if I deliberately go and look which is not very often because I don’t spend an awful lot of time on Facebook I have to say. Yes, sometimes I look just to see what’s going on. The main page that I would look at would be the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] one because that’s the most active.

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: There is actually… In the pandemic, there is a group that was set up for all four villages for support. Actually, if I post something I will post it onto that page as well. I’m actually an admin of that group so I can… So, actually, it would be the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] group and it would be that pandemic support group page that I would probably monitor the most to see what was going on.

Ian: How do you find out what’s happening around the villages, if not through those Facebook groups?

Respondent: People will tell me. (Laughter) People will ring me and say, “Did you know that there was a body found hanging in the woods yesterday?” They’ll just ring me and tell me because they think-

Ian: Yes, so everything from that to, “There’s a new singing group or a new choir or whatever.”?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: So you’ll just do by word of mouth? I guess that’s because of your role-

Respondent: Yes, actually being part of [REDACTED PLACE NAME] actually and working with Bacmans as well kind of helps me to keep my eye on what’s happening.

Ian: Great. I’ve got loads of questions about Facebook groups but I think we’re running out of time and I don’t want to keep you for too long. So you are one of the admins of that new group that [ANON PERSON] told me about?

Respondent: Yes, isolation group or-

Ian: Who else are admins of that? I would like to talk to people about that group but I’ll talk to other people.

Respondent: You need to speak to CC ghsdh sjh that rdacted redacted . on Facebook she’s known as XXXXXXXXXXX Because she works for the Xxxxxx Xccxcxcx, I think she wanted to keep herself a bit anonymous. Xxxxxxxx is really the main drive behind the pandemic support group.

Ian: Great. Does [ANON PERSON] know her, would I be able to get in touch with her through [ANON PERSON]?

Respondent: Yes, [ANON PERSON] would know her. Yes, yes, [ANON PERSON] would know her.

Ian: I want to start lining up some other people to speak to with the main focus on the Facebook groups because I want to find out… That one, in particular, is super-interesting because it was very much as a result of a certain set of conditions. I just wonder how things have panned out with that group or changed but I will not bore you with those questions, I will keep them for Xxxxxxxx.

That’s great, yes. I think I’ll just leave it there with my questions then because you spoke for a long time and it’s been really, really, interesting and you’ve been really generous and honest so thank you for that. Have you got any questions for me? You had some questions about what I might be writing up and stuff, do you want to…?

Respondent: Yes. When is the report going to be…? Are you writing a report and when is it going to be published?

Ian: Yes. What will happen is I will probably write a report for the purposes of [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and it won’t go any further than that. So there might be an internal report, that one will probably not have a lot of direct quotes. I’ll probably just try to talk at a kind of summative level although I might have a few quotes just to highlight what people are saying about things. That wouldn’t be anything that you spoke about that was more biographical about you at all.

Other than that, the thing might be if we were to produce an academic report which would be a lot later for us to write it and even longer again for it to get anywhere.

Respondent: Yes. I think I’m going to be able to tell people I’m leaving in a couple of weeks, finally.

Ian: Right. Well, yes, academic publishing is chronically slow.

Respondent: A long time?

Ian: Yes, chronically slow. Even in that, because you’ve got certain circumstances… I would do this to anyone anyway, but I could send you a final draft of anything and you could look. If you can identify yourself in it or if you think… You would be able to because you’d be like, “I remember saying that.” You could send me an email at any time, you’ve got my email now. If you’re like, “Can I have a look at stuff?” or whatever, I’d be more than happy to do that.

Respondent: I think it’s really interesting to know what you come up with really, because yes-

Ian: At this point, I don’t even know what the purpose of any kind of academic reporting would be because it’s a bit focused on what [ANON PERSON] wanted which was, “What would a new information system look like?” As happens when you start doing interviews and you start identifying themes across what people are saying, all of a sudden you’re like, “Oh, this is something interesting.”

Respondent: If you ever wanted to have a chat to one of the ladies who had not had a smartphone or access to the internet before and now does, and has learned how to use Facebook, then just let me know and I’ll get you-

Ian: 100%, I would love… I understand that might not be a Zoom, I might have to come up.

Respondent: It’ll probably be on the phone.

Ian: Oh yes, great.

Respondent: They’re good on the phone.

Ian: I don’t know how- Yes, I would have to be in the office to do that but, yes, I hope- I might drop you an email in the next couple of days then.

Respondent: Actually they can do Zoom because they can phone into Zoom, that’s what they… They have the phone. I remember one occasion when I was in the garden, it was fairly early on in the pandemic and I was trying to teach them how to use Zoom on their smartphone in a socially distanced way and it was impossible to do. Like, “Why have you switched the phone off? How have you switched the phone off?” They do not do Zoom on the app.

Ian: Yes, my mother is pretty digitally illiterate.

Respondent: Oh. Sorry, I’m going to have to go.