

# DotChurch / DotEglwys

## Purpose of the Paper

This paper provides a proposal for the creation of a significant online presence/offering of worship and mission for the northern dioceses of the Church in Wales: an opportunity for the Dioceses of Bangor and St Asaph to minister together to the communities which they serve.

## Background

The ideas in this paper were developed during a series of Zoom meetings in Winter/Spring 2020/21 followed by an in-person workshop in Llandudno Junction in July 2021.

The working group comprised:

- Revd Kim Williams, Ministry Area Leader, Bro Eifionydd (Bangor)
- Naomi Wood, Children and Families Ministry Officer (Bangor)
- Fr George Bearwood, Curate in Alyn Mission Area (St Asaph)
- Jon Andrews, Youth and Childrens' Chaplain (St Asaph)
- Revd Ben Lines, Curate in the Aberconwy Mission Area (St Asaph) and member of the Provincial Digital Innovations Group
- Karen Maurice, Communications Officer (St Asaph)
- Canon Robert Townsend, Ministry Area Leader, Bro Seiriol (Bangor)

For the Zoom sessions, the group included the Diocesan Secretaries for Bangor and St Asaph, Siôn Rhys Evans and Diane McCarthy.

## Working Title

The name, brand, and logo are crucial to the success of this project and should reflect the theological imperatives and values which underpin the project.

One possible name discussed by the group is *DotChurch / DotEglwys*.

The project is based on the concept of what a Cathedral should aim to be - outward facing, inclusive, open to all, with excellence as its beacon. However, the word *Cathedral* is felt to be a barrier, particularly for people presently outside the regular church family. Use of the term 'digital' was also not recommended, as it would be a time limited concept, dating it to 2021.

It was felt that as an idea, *DotChurch / DotEglwys* works in both English and Welsh and a logo using a cross over the letter o (as on an OS map), neatly captures the essence of this vision.

## Virtual World vs Physical World

For many younger people there is no distinction between the virtual and the physical world. They meet their friends virtually, they shop virtually, they carry out essential services (like doctor's appointments) virtually and during the pandemic, they learnt virtually. For those new audiences, a virtual sacred space is essential and a gateway to faith.

Yet, Christianity is rooted in incarnation and the group was clear, that *DotChurch / DotEglwys* needs to have links with the physical church. It should offer access to the local church community and be recognisable people within it. For example, in times of crisis a pastoral (physical) visit could be essential.

Theological thinking will be required to consider how *DotChurch / DotEglwys* handles sacraments such as Eucharists and Baptisms.

There are several ways that strong links can be built between physical church and *DotChurch / DotEglwys*:

- Appoint online chaplains – ordained or lay – who could visit local schools and connect young people with *DotChurch / DotEglwys*.
- Commission content from locations across both dioceses. Assist computer and AV-literate local clergy or laity to provide content at various times.
- Encourage in-person social meetups

## Look, Feel and Values

*DotChurch / DotEglwys* should be distinctively Christian. It needs to be high quality with a local tinge and connection. Investment would be required in the online platform and app, supported by engaging social media that wants people to respond. The website and app should be bilingual, visually exciting, and easy to navigate. Access to high spec cameras and AV equipment are important for good quality content.

Online worship should include interactivity and visual overlays. Content must be inclusive, culturally relevant and accessible to all (with subtitles which are coded correctly for screen readers, British Sign Language and Makaton). It should be broad but not beige in its appeal (not reflecting one style of worship or tradition) and vary in the depth of topics it offers for discussion and interaction. It should aim to enable and encourage, offering a welcome and safe space for all.

**Engagement and Broadcast** (In other words, the balance between outward-focus mission and online 'in-building' replacement worship)

The pandemic and ensuing closure of church buildings meant many services moved online, utilising various platforms, such as Zoom, Facebook and Youtube. Online 'in-building' replacement worship happened regularly, to varying standards. Some was done well, some was not. People who had previously gone to church, simply accessed the same services, broadcast

online, either from an empty church building or a home setting. Some people embraced the opportunity to use images and different types of music to develop online worship.

Fewer lay-people and clergy embraced the prominence of online platforms to create new content, offering new ways to worship and therefore a better chance to connect with new people/audiences.

*DotChurch / DotEglwys* needs to be about building a community, just like traditional church. It needs to engage and offer opportunities to meet people where they are in a safe online space.

There will always be a tension between engagement and broadcast – understanding that tension will help find the right balance, ensuring mission-focussed engagement content is present alongside worshipful and spiritually nourishing broadcast content.

The mission-focussed engagement content could include

- Daily live prayers
- An online prayer wall
- A space to light an online candle
- The opportunity to chat / support people via live chat functions, with clear safeguarding procedures in place. Online chat could be available at specific times each day and could be staffed by trained volunteers.
- Weekly talks offering opportunities to discuss the big ideas it tackles. Such talks could be a Sunday sermon, re-packaged as a short film (or podcast) and made available online, to then be discussed during the week, in an online study group. This will help engage with people who don't want to/are unable to join *DotChurch / DotEglwys* on Sundays.
- Online Alpha or similar courses
- Reflections responding to news events, so there's timely analysis of global events
- High quality content for big festivals such as Christmas, Easter etc
- Resources to develop faith at home for children and young people
- Resources for collective worship in church and community schools: for Additional Learning Needs (ALN), secondary and primary pupils

Included in the 'broadcast' content of *DotChurch / DotEglwys* to support existing mission and ministry areas in both dioceses could be:

- Weekly Zoom services in both languages, which offers interaction and different expressions of worship.
- Weekly Youtube services offering different expressions of worship
- A weekly Zoom Bible study
- A weekly high-quality streamed worship, eg from each Cathedral
- Services of the Word in pdf format, with a weekly address, for people to download and use at home
- Digital Ministry training and equipment resourcing

## Resourcing

*DotChurch / DotEglwys* will need a full-time team for proper resourcing. It would be headed up by a Commissioning Editor who is responsible for planning, organising, quality control of content and line-management of the new online ministry team. Members of this team (who could be lay or ordained) - will need:

- Charisma and energy to draw people in
- Excellent computer and online skills
- A genuine calling/vocation to online ministry

*DotChurch / DotEglwys* could have a team of six online chaplains (1 per archdeaconry) and the team (as a whole) would need the following gifts:

- Proactive and genuine social media engagement
- Content production skills – to be done in various locations across the two dioceses, to embed *DotChurch / DotEglwys* locally and reflect north Wales.
- A Commissioning Editor – someone to quality control the submissions

In addition, a team of online-content champions across both dioceses could be looking out for good stories (harnessing the skills of good local newspaper journalists!)

*DotChurch / DotEglwys* may require space and support services in both diocesan offices. Consideration could also be given to the location of a studio which could be always available to produce good quality content without the need to constantly rig and de-rig. Thought should also be given to the workspaces of online chaplains so that they can also easily produce content indoors, as well as on location.

## Finance/Stewardship

*DotChurch / DotEglwys* will need mechanisms to raise money from the start. It will encourage faithful giving through discipleship and teaching, making online giving an easy option. In addition, it could develop a range of merchandise for sale in an online shop. Partnerships with strictly vetted third parties, which align with the values of *DotChurch / DotEglwys*, could also be explored.

## In Summary

*DotChurch / DotEglwys* has the potential to extend the mission and ministry of our two dioceses and take it well into the 21st Century. This requires investment, and it may well mean giving up some of what we currently hold dear, to free-up resources for *DotChurch / DotEglwys*. If we are serious about continuing the mission and ministry of the Christian Church to meet the needs of our communities, we must make a significant investment in our future online presence.