



God is at work anywhere

Haywards Heath Baptist Church experienced fruit and encouragement from moving Alpha online, initially during the lockdown. Deacon Penny Jenkins explains more.

We ran an online *Alpha* in June 2020. As a church we were technically able, and many of us were using Zoom, so we just decided to give it a go. *Alpha* were saying lots of people were holding courses online.

It worked really well. We were surprised at how much people shared and interacted, even in the confines of the Zoom window.

We had people who never would have had joined an onsite *Alpha*. They found it easier because it was in their front room – there's something about being in an environment that's well known to them.

People came to know Christ in a definite way! One of them was Trace, a lady on the edges of our church. Her daughter is part of our church, and Trace would stay outside when she picked her up. She had previously been invited to *Alpha* but had never come.

But online worked for her, and it was our privilege to see God working in her life. She has continued to meet online, she's so hungry for Christ.

We tried another online *Alpha* in spring 2021, and then another in February 2022. Trace was encouraged to lead a little, and she felt safer doing this on Zoom.

She also invited someone who described herself as Buddhist. We had strange and good conversations! People were sharing experiences, talking about prayer. There were some great discussions. We saw God at work.

The Buddhist lady kept coming and went away with a much deeper understanding of the Christian faith. I don't think she would have come to an onsite *Alpha* - just getting there would have been difficult.

Looking back, there was something about the whole pandemic experience that gave people a hunger. And online worked for a variety of reasons – it's more manageable, in a contained time, you don't have to travel. Those who come retain a degree of independence and some control.

It reached parents, carers, people who would have struggled to go out otherwise. We had people who had moved from the area but still wanted to link to the church. They invited colleagues too.

For some people, having a meal with strangers is terrifying. It also takes a lot to just walk into a strange place. Some people don't feel good enough to walk into a church. People's health and anxiety levels were also a factor.

Last autumn we ran a *Discipleship Explored* course, and this was online again. People who came were of all ages and different experiences in church. We had lively and Spirit-led discussions.

God will work where he will work. If you create an opportunity for people to hear about God, he will speak to their hearts. God is at work anywhere.

Penny Jenkins is a deacon at Haywards Heath Baptist Church in Sussex, and helped to lead the church's online *Alpha* Courses.

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