

More than a million people are being reached every month with the Christian message on social media, a year after the Church of England adopted a new digital approach, new figures show.

Videos, podcasts, blogs and images including prayers are reaching an online audience of 1.2 million a month through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, according to the statistics from the Church of England digital project.

During Christmas 1.5 million were reached through the Church's award-winning #JoyToTheWorld campaign featuring short films. A further 2.5 million were reached during Lent, the season before Easter, through the #LiveLent project.

The report has been released as new Mission Statistics showed average Sunday attendance over October 2016 at Church of England services stood at 780,000 people, a lower figure than in 2015, in line with a long-term trend.

The 'worshipping community' of the Church of England, a measure of the number of people who come to church once a month or more, stood at 1.1 million of whom 20% were under 18 years old.

On average, 930,000 people (86% adults, 14% children under 16) attended church services each week in October 2016. (This figure includes mid-week services). A further 180,000 children and adults attended services for schools in churches each week, a rise of 6.2% on last year.

Christmas attendance - on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day - rose by 1.4% in 2016 to 2.6 million. During Advent, the season before Christmas, 2.5 million people attended special services for the congregation and local community, and 2.8 million people attended special services for civic organisations and schools.

There were 120,000 baptisms and services of thanksgiving for the gift of a child, 45,000 marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriage and 139,000 Church of England-led funerals.

A one-off question for 2016 showed the majority of churches are open to visitors outside of service times with more than 50% of churches reporting being open to visitors five or more days each week.

The digital campaign has been funded as part of the Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme intended to help the Church of England become a growing church in all places and for all people.

William Nye, Secretary General to the General Synod, said: "At the heart of the mission of the Church of England is a commitment to proclaiming the gospel afresh in each generation.

"This year's Statistics for Mission provide a sobering reminder of the long-term challenge we face. This challenge is likely to persist for some years ahead. That is why we have established a programme of Renewal and Reform to transform the Church of England to become a growing church in every region and for every generation.

"The figures on digital impact, which we are also releasing today, show one of the ways in which we are doing that, as the online dimension of people's lives becomes ever more significant. Our challenge is to join up that growing online Church life to the physical community of Church that forms the body of Christ."

Mike Eastwood, Director of Renewal and Reform for the Church of England, said: "I am encouraged by the success so far of the digital campaign, part of Renewal and Reform. This project has shown how social media can be used to communicate the Christian faith and life to a huge audience outside our church walls, bringing new hope to the communities we serve."

"The figures for mission confirm the urgency of the challenges we face, especially as we want to become a growing church for all people in all places."

Adrian Harris, Head of Digital Communications for the Church of England said: "As the digital evangelism statistics show, people across the country are engaging with the Church's digital and social media platforms to grow in faith and find out more about the Christian faith. In a typical month we have a reach of 1.2 million on social media and 1.5 million on our websites."

"We saw 1.5 million reached by our 2016 #JoyToTheWorld Christmas campaign and 2.5 million with #LiveLent. Over the last 12 months we tripled the number of followers on Facebook and Instagram, which indicates that people want to know more of the love of Jesus Christ."

"The three-year digital and social media transformation project is part of the Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme, focused on us being a growing Church for all people and for all places."

Dr Rachel Jordan, the Church of England's National Mission and Evangelism Adviser, said: "The Church of England has taken seriously the challenge of ageing congregations and is sharpening its focus and work on the opportunities of reaching new generations in different ways - church growth starts young. Our digital presence has been boosted by the work of the Renewal and Reform programme investing in an excellent team communicating effectively with millions through digital campaigns."

Notes to editors

The three-year digital transformation includes the launch of the new [Church of England](#) and [A Church Near You](#) websites by the end of 2017.

Both sites are being redeveloped to enable Christians to grow in their faith and help bring new people to faith.

In addition, a series of free training courses has been launched for churches on promoting their parishes through social media with more than half of the Church of England 42 dioceses signed up to take part so far.

Reach is defined as the number of people who have seen content on social media.

The Mission Statistics do not include services in prisons, hospitals, schools and military chapels and university chaplaincies.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-england-reaches-more-million-social-media-every-month>