



Embracing change

David Boyd

Irish mission worker in Dublin

You don't need me to tell you that the past year has been the most challenging period in our lifetime. The pandemic has radically altered every aspect of life as we know it, and in particular the life of our churches. It has presented a threat to long-established and cherished patterns, but it also offers opportunities for significant, life-affirming change.

Many of us in the church have resisted the digital revolution, wanting to cling to the old ways of doing things, only to find ourselves flung into the deep end of YouTube, Zoom, Facebook et al, with the closure of our church buildings. It has been a steep learning curve but has opened up the possibility of reaching people who would never darken the door of the church.

In Adelaide Road congregation, the lockdown has meant the closure of our church building, and our services, prayer meetings, home groups, Session and committee meetings have all moved online. Our international café has also been forced to go online, which is far from ideal, as a communal meal, and the fellowship around that, was the central hub of our student gatherings. However, for international students living through lockdown, staring at four walls, even our online café is a welcome diversion and an opportunity to practise their English. They are as delighted to see us as we are to see them!

In our café on Zoom, we can play games and chat with the students in breakout rooms, building relationships that hopefully lead to deeper conversations and invitations for them to join us in Bible studies online. One advantage of this online arrangement is

that distance is not a barrier to participation. My son, Ethan, and his wife, Stephanie, have been very involved with the café for a long time. They went to Brazil last December to visit Stephanie's mother and have been there ever since, as there are no flights available to enable a return to Ireland. However, through Zoom,

they can still play a leading role in the café, just as if they were right here in Dublin.

I am currently doing a weekly Bible study with a woman who attended the café. She has been back home in Germany

since last December but still joins me on Wednesday nights for Bible study with another woman. I have been using the Word One to One material which is ideally suited for use on Zoom, and the two women are enthusiastic about the difference these studies are making to their lives.

So, despite its negative aspects, living through lockdown has shown me that, far from railing against the restrictions placed upon us, we should be seeing it as a God-given opportunity to use the resources that he has made available to us, in new and creative ways.

...far from railing against the restrictions placed upon us, we should be seeing it as a God-given opportunity...

Please pray:

- Pray for the café team and the students that we meet online
- Pray for the new 'buddy' system that we are setting up where we will try to match each student with a mentor from the café team.
- Pray for the Bible studies with the students.