Twitter Thread by Dave Gobbett



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1/ To meet or not to meet, that is the question. Is Highfields Church going to keep meeting in-person on Sundays? (27 part thread coming up, for the brave-hearted), beginning with three intro comments:

2/ • This is a wisdom call not a right/wrong call; Satan would love to have churches & leadership teams divided on the topic, so we need to pray for unity and grace as we decide what's best in our context.

3/ • What we decide will vary hugely on what the virus is doing in the geography and the demography of the church. I have friends pastoring where the case rate is over 1000, with majority older congregation. I don't judge them at all for making the call to close.

4/ • I'm not going to rehearse the theological reasons for in-person gathering (e.g. by @WilliamsGarryJ earlier this week, which you can read again here: https://t.co/4ZwgG4B1sa).

5/ Rather this thread will focus on 10 practical reasons why in our context, we've decided to keep meeting in-person on Sundays (though we'll keep reviewing, in line with Welsh Govt guidance).

6/ 1.The case numbers in Cardiff continue to fall (currently 362 per 100,000 in Cardiff), and have done since 18 December. If we were going to close, then the logic would suggest closing before now.

7/ Since we have been open, during this higher peak of cases, why shut now, given we're around half of the pre-Christmas peak?
2.The experience of watching church online from home varies enormously according to your domestic situation.

8/ For older people who are happy to sit and concentrate in front of the television, maybe as a couple, or with older children, it might feel totally straightforward, if you are committed to doing it. If you're single, it can be quite a painful, isolating experience.

9/ If you have younger children, it can be a nightmare. Most children have not been trained to behave in the way they would in church, in their living room, and (speaking personally) it always leaves us rather down-hearted.

10/ Also, now that schools have closed (reducing the spread of infection) where children as young as five, are expected to sit in front of a laptop to engage in learning from Monday to Friday, I imagine a very serious degree of screen fatigue by Sunday.

11/ It is unhealthy for our families to be constantly around screens not engaging with real people (at least the half of their faces we can see!)
3.People have been voting with their feet in coming to our services (especially families and younger singles or couples).

12/ If people feel safe, and feel free to come or not come, and have been choosing to come (despite the high cases), then there is clearly an appetite for in-person worship.

13/ While some are freely (and given their situation, wisely) staying away, many people evidently still feel safe coming to church and are prepared to take the small risk to their (and public) health for the immense added spiritual and psychological blessing for them and…

14/ …others.
https://t.co/dMiVsvqj6e every service we are having visitors (we can tell this, because they were not booked in by our online booking system). In my mind, staying safely open serves our local community and demonstrates our love for neighbour.

15/ If the building was closed, they would be missing out on hearing the hope that is only found in Jesus. Yes they could be watching online at home. Many are doing that. But those particular people who came at that particular time, would not be doing so.

16/ https://t.co/g0OJloXuyO watching figures are not everything but tell an interesting story. While several hundred viewers are watching each service (good news!), the average viewing length is 13 mins (not so good news!).

17/ Perhaps a better metric is total length of time services are watched for. The average service gets watched for around 40 hours in total. Given the services are around 1 hour, this means, on average 40 devices watch the full hour.

18/ Again, not particularly encouraging (though some people may be just watching the sermon, which will distort the numbers).
6.The Welsh Government and Public Health Wales are doing all in their power to stop the spread of the virus.

19/ For as long as they judge that public worship services can be conducted safely, then that is another endorsement.

20/ 7.We still have heard of no scientific evidence of community transmission of the virus due to public worship; and the only experience we have of being contacted by Test and Trace after a fellow pastor tested positive (3 days after a carol service) is that no one was asked…

21/ …to self-isolate, and no one caught the virus, which is a vindication of how serious we take our procedures. And that was at a time when the case levels in Cardiff were sky high.

22/ We think that being extra vigilant with our current practice (e.g doing deeper cleaning between services, urging people to leave promptly at end of services, no mingling outside, perhaps keeping wearing masks outside until fully dispersed, giving permission for those more…

23/ …nervous to stay back, etc) would be sufficient, as opposed to choosing to close on Sundays.
8.Other like-minded Cardiff churches are staying open.

24/ 9.Fundamentally, until we caution people not to go to the shops in person for physical food, we don't feel its right to prevent them from coming to church for spiritual food (Matt. 4:4).

25/ What better way to show that Christ is our hope in life and death than by publicly proclaiming him to a world in need? Of course each person should decide in their own mind whether it would be right to come.

26/ It may be advisable for some to stay back, e.g. the vulnerable and elderly etc, this side of the vaccine. But that's different from stopping everyone from coming, who wants to, and who deems it no riskier than going to Tesco.

27/ 10.Lastly, an anecdote from someone from families WhatsApp group: 'Was a joy to be back in the building, grateful the government have considered it essential. I'm fully in agreement with them on that!' END